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VIVE LA COMMUNE!

THE RED SPELL



Francis Gribble



See Section 3393

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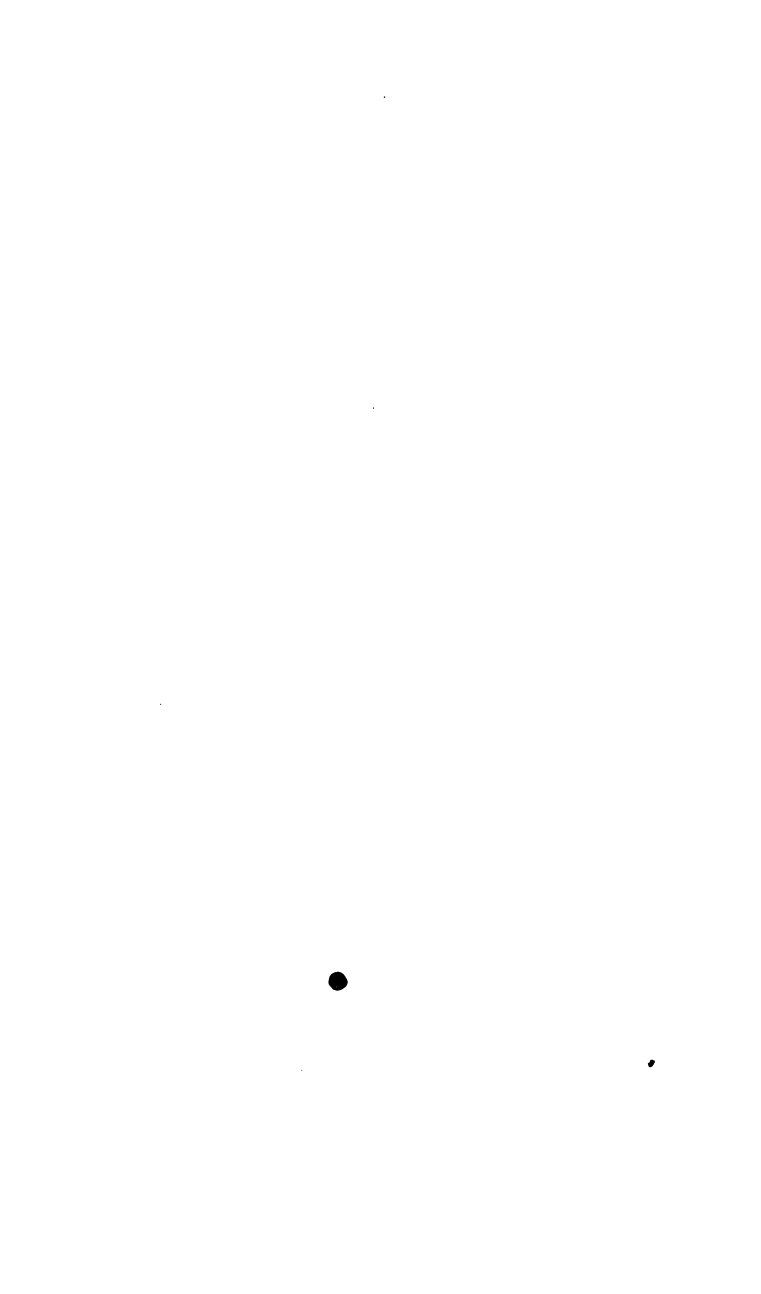
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The Flolts on February 22, 1903

✦ The first marriage in Memorial Church









THE RED SPELL



THE RED SPELL

BY

Henry
FRANCIS GRIBBLE
//

Westminster

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**THE
RED SPELL**

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I

The place was the Palace of the Tuileries, and the time was the evening of the fourteenth day of May 1871. There was a great fête given there that night, 'for the benefit'—so ran the placards—'of the widows and orphans of the Commune.' Just seven days later, the soldiers of Versailles were to pour into Paris through the Saint Cloud Gate, and, in the name of order, snuff the Commune out. But, for the mass of the people, there were no signs of that as yet; and, in the meantime, the widows and orphans profited, and the lights flared from the windows of the palace, and the mob made holiday in the gardens.

For the rule of Commune in Paris was not, as some suppose,

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a reign of gloom and terror. Its gloom was scattered by the native gaiety of a mercurial people: its terror was only for an individual here and there.

Certain things happened, it is true—the picturesque things that people talked about. A few priests were arrested—your true Parisian revolutionist is never quite so happy as when he is arresting priests. A few nuns were taken from their convents and packed off to the penitentiary at Saint Lazare—the relations between revolutionists and nuns are nearly always strained. Queer stories were told, too, of the unseemly midnight revelry of loose company at the Prefecture of Police. And detachments of the National Guard, more often drunk than sober, would knock at the door of any house they chose to pitch upon, and search the premises for conscripts, who would be promptly uniformed and marched off to the trenches at Neuilly or Courbevoie.

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And peaceable civilians, who disliked to be enlisted in this rough and ready manner, might be constrained to hide themselves in empty wine casks in the cellar, or to bribe the sentries to lower them over the ramparts after nightfall. Also, there was a park of artillery in the square opposite the Hôtel de Ville; and the ruffians of Belleville—male and female—made club-houses of the churches, and would smoke and drink there, using the font for a tobacco box; and soldiers would be met marching out to battle with loaves of bread stuck on the points of their bayonets; and the casual passer-by, as he went down the street, would be stopped and bidden to lend a hand at the building of a barricade.

But these things—the picturesque and painful things—only happened intermittently, and have been remembered and talked about out of all relation to their real importance. They were, in

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fact, to most people rather a show to look on at than an essential part of life. For most people, after all, were not arrested, and most people escaped the visitations of the National Guards, or found them corruptible with five-franc pieces, so that the social life of Paris went on much as usual. The rich were still rich, and the poor still poor, although the Commune had abolished rents. The workmen still drank the same sour wine as heretofore, while Monsieur Raoul Rigault, and his friend Monsieur Ferré spent eighty francs in lunching 'à la carte.' For the rest, the children still went to school, the cafés were still open and frequented, the shops still exhibited their wares, the theatres still gave performances to crowded houses, and the mass of men and women were more occupied with their own private comedies and tragedies than with the greater drama of the social revolution that was being played

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out in their midst. Above all, the people still kept their gaiety, and still amused themselves.

That night in particular the gaiety was great. The Emperor Napoleon and his court had shut the people out from the Garden of the Tuileries, and now they had come into their own again, and were welcoming themselves back to their estate, without any thought of the horrors that were to come. The shells from the bombarding batteries that burst in the dark avenues of the Champs Elysées near at hand only moved their mirth. They laughed and sang and danced and pushed against each other like children just let out to play.

There must have been ten thousand merry-makers at the least—high and low, rich and poor, well-dressed and ragged. But this story only concerns itself with two of them—two lovers, whose true love the Commune had arrived to trouble—Elise Rollin, the shop-girl of the Rue

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de Rivoli, and Ernest Durand, the Member of the Council of the Commune. And even they, for the moment, had forgotten to think about the things that were most serious to them, and had caught the infection of the general merriment.

'You must take me everywhere, Ernest; you must show me everything,' she said.

So the Member of the Council of the Commune gave Elise his arm and showed her all the sights. They passed through the Salle des Maréchaux, where Mademoiselle Agar, the great tragédienne, was celebrating the Revolution in Alexandrine verse; they loitered in the galleries, listening to the quaint comments of sightseers who had come all the way from Belleville or Saint Antoine or Montrouge to find out what an emperor's palace might be like; they stood for a while in the great hall, where an orchestra of a thousand instruments pealed out the 'Marseil-

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laise.' Then they strolled down into the gardens, where the Venetian lamps hung upon the orange-trees, and the people prattled as they sat or roamed about, and the lovers kissed each other in the arbours, and the music tried to drown the distant roaring of the cannon at the Porte Maillot.

But the thunder of the guns was louder than the melodies of Offenbach. Elise heard them booming out beyond the ramparts, and the sound hastened the inevitable reaction and made her grave and serious again.

'Take me out of the crowd, Ernest,' she said; 'I want to talk.'

He found a vacant arbour where they could be undisturbed, and they sat down in it together.

And yet, for a space, neither of them spoke. It was so good to be together, enjoying the present without thought of the troubles that seemed so sure to overtake them soon,—so hard to recognise

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by any formal word that love must presently yield to politics the first place in the life of every faithful servant of the Commune. So Elise Rollin nestled close to her lover, clinging to his arm with both her little hands, and looking up, through her brown clustering curls, into his face.

It was not a handsome face, the features were irregular and rough, and the right cheek carried a scar, earned on the field of honour at Buzenval. But the bright grey eyes were good. Frankness and enthusiasm were always there, and now they also shone with love—the love of a strong man for a woman whom he must protect. And the mouth, too, was good, for its lines spelt determination. It was the mouth of a man who would do what he believed that duty bade him do, even though love itself should try to draw him back.

Yet there would be a struggle. For days he had felt the crucial

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moment of that struggle drawing nearer; and now, at last, it had arrived. For Elise clutched at his elbow pleadingly, and began to talk about the Commune.

'Listen,' she said. 'The guns are nearer now. Always and always nearer. The Commune is being beaten, Ernest. Am I not right?'

He put his arm round her, and held her closer to him as he answered—

'The Commune is not beaten yet, my sweetheart.'

But still she was not re-assured.

'Not yet, Ernest; no, not yet,' she said. 'And still I am afraid. For every day I read the placards on the walls telling of the great victories that we have won, and every day the shells of the Versaillais fall closer and closer to the heart of Paris. Oh yes, I am afraid, Ernest—terribly and terribly afraid.'

It was a hard thing for him to hear; for he, too, was afraid—for her. Yet he kissed her tenderly,

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and said what words he could to try and dissipate her fears. The Commune had been mismanaged. Wrong men had been suffered to have influence in its councils. There had been traitors. But the presence of danger had brought the true leaders of the people to the front. And the Parisians could fight, — none better. Paris had fought France before and conquered,—in '93, in '48.

But his arguments did not avail to quell her fears. They could not while the grim voices of the guns were sounding in her ears. Her impulse was to cry, but she withstood it. Yet a beginning of tears was in her voice as she said the thing she hardly dared to say.

'O Ernest, I think that I begin to hate this Commune.'

That, too, was hard for him to hear, seeing that he was one of the few men to whom the Commune represented a great political ideal, and not a mere scheme

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like another for plundering his neighbours. Yet the speech did not shake his love for her. He understood that it was only her love for him—her fear that the Commune should come between them—that had inspired it. He could not be angry with her for that.

None the less he protested gently: 'And yet you used to tell me that you loved the Commune once, Elise,' and went on to remind her of the time.

'Do you remember,' he asked her, 'that afternoon in March, when I took you to see the cannon on Butte Montmartre,—the cannon we had dragged up onto the hill, so that the Prussians might not take them? It was the day after I had asked you to marry me, and you had promised. We were so happy, both of us, as we walked in the sunshine, and I talked to you of all that the Commune was to do for Paris, and you listened, and were glad, and full of hope. Oh

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yes, Elise, you loved the Commune then.'

There was a smile—a sad smile—on her lips as she replied—

'Perhaps I thought so, Ernest. But I know better now. I am quite sure now that it was you and not the Commune that I loved.'

He pressed one of her little hands in both of his, and she continued, whispering in his ear—

'Don't you see, Ernest? Don't you understand? I'm jealous of the Commune.'

'No, no, my sweetheart. There is no reason,' he answered quickly.

She went on—

'Ah, but I am jealous, Ernest, and there is every reason. Once, for a little while, I think, I was jealous of—you know—that other woman——'

He interrupted her with solemn protestations—

'You were jealous of Suzanne? You were jealous of La Capitaine,

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a mere acquaintance of the cafés—a woman whom I would not even speak of in your presence? But you know, Elise, that there never was anything between us, and that if there ever was anything, it is over long ago. If it makes you unhappy to think of her, I will tell you that I hate her.' Elise made haste to answer—

'Yes, I know, I know. I am not jealous of her now. I have too much contempt for her. Only I heard people talk; and she is pretty, and she sits on barricades, and says she will fight for the Commune with the men, and just for a little while I thought—but I know better now. It is only the Commune that makes me jealous now, because the Commune is going to take your love away from me.'

'Not that, Elise, not that!

There was an earnest passion in his accents that emboldened her. She looked fondly into his clear grey eyes, and then, in soft caressing tones, appealed to him,

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‘Ernest, love is worth more than politics.’

He did not speak.

‘One cannot have both, Ernest—not in these days. One has to choose, and if one chooses love—’ But still no answer, though he half-guessed what she was about to say. ‘And, if one chooses love, I say, before it is too late, why then all that one has to do is to leave Paris.’

It was what he had feared; and, as they sat there, in the dim romantic light, with the music voluptuously singing in their ears, reminding them of all the joys that had been and might be again for happy lovers, the impulse was strong on him to yield, to give up everything, and take Elise away with him into the quiet country where men lived at peace with one another. But, even while he felt the longing, he was ashamed of it. He could not be a traitor—a coward—like Rochefort, like Felix Pyat.

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'Sweetheart,' he answered gently, 'you must not ask me to do that. It is impossible.'

'Not impossible, Ernest,' she pleaded.

'Yes, sweetheart, impossible. You do not love the Commune? No. But you would not love me if I betrayed the Commune—if I betrayed any cause that I had sworn to serve. And even if you did, I should know that I was not worthy of your love.'

He went on, his eloquence increasing as he spoke of the cause which he loved as ardently as any Christian martyr loved his faith of old.

'No, no, Elise, you must not ask me to do that. There are some things that a man must not do, even for love. It is a great cause—this cause of the Commune that we are fighting for. It is the cause of the poor—of the workers—in all countries and for all time. You think we have done very little for the workers yet. True; but we have done something.'

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Already they are happier, already their lives are brighter than in the old days when the bourgeoisie had their way with them. There is still much to be done ; even the Commune cannot do everything at once. But if the leaders of the Commune fall away from it as soon as danger threatens, then, indeed, nothing will be done. No, no. One must be brave. One must not turn one's back on one's whole life. One must go through with things, and afterwards—'

The noise of the artillery beyond the ramparts fell again on Elise Rollin's ear. She shuddered.

'But suppose the Commune is beaten, Ernest,' she said. 'Then there will be no afterwards for you and me. What do you say then?' It was a hard effort ; for he had to resist himself as well as her. But he replied—

'I still say, my sweetheart, that one must be brave.' And then, after a pause—

'Elise, will you not help me to be brave?'

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For her too it was an effort. For she saw, more clearly than he did, how hopeless was the cause he fought for. But she answered, letting her head droop upon his shoulder—

‘Yes, Ernest, I will try to help you to be brave.’

And then they sat silent, holding one another’s hands, until the thinning of the crowd warned Elise that it was time that she was taken home, and Ernest that Delescluze had given him a mid-night appointment at the Hôtel de Ville.

II

Cabs were still plying for hire in Paris, although the death-agony of the Commune was so near. So Ernest Durand drove with Elise to the house where she was living in Grenelle, on the south side of the Seine.

They hardly spoke, as the ramshackle carriage jolted them over

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the clattering stones. For their hearts were far too full for small-talk, and the pressing things that Elise had wished to say were said. Assured that the Commune had not taken her lover's love away from her, she was submissive and docile as a child, and for the moment very nearly happy.

'You won't ask me to leave Paris any more, Elise,' he said, when they stood at last upon the doorstep.

'No, Ernest, I won't ask you that, if duty says that you must stay.'

'And you will help me to be brave, my sweetheart?'

'Yes, dearest, I will try to help you to be brave.'

Then he said what he could to cheer and to encourage her, repeating that the Commune was not beaten yet, that, now that they had closed their ranks and healed their discords, there was still good hope that they would drive the Versailles back, and so said good-night and drove off to keep his political appointment.

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It was not an appointment of any consequence—merely an appointment to discuss matters of no immediate importance. For it was the prevailing characteristic of these Communists that they continued to discuss matters of no immediate importance to the last. Even when the enemy was within their walls a batch of them were sitting in solemn conclave to discuss the hours at which the people should be admitted to the public picture galleries and museums.

So Ernest Durand, who had a keener eye for the realities than some of them, wearied of the unprofitable talk, and excused himself as soon as he was able.

Besides, his personal life had become rather more real than usual to him during these last two hours, and there were things that he wanted to think out.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, the cafés were still open; but he entered none of them, though friends, every now and

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again, recognised, and called to him.

Only once he was obliged to stop, as he was crossing the Boulevard Montmartre. For, just as he was passing the Café de Madrid, a woman ran out into the road and spoke to him.

It was that other woman,—the woman of whom Elise had said that once, for a little while, she had been jealous. She too had pressing things to say to him.

Truly she was pretty enough to give cause for jealousy, a very different sort of person from the dames des halles, from whom most of the Amazons of the Commune were recruited. Her short blue skirts were trimmed with red. She wore untanned boots, and a tiny blue hat, with red feathers arranged in it coquettishly. Even the pistol stuck in her belt had a coquettish air in it, though it seemed likely that she would use that pistol readily enough if ever occasion should arise.

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Such was Suzanne Jouffroy, whom people called La Capitaine. She called to Ernest Durand as she saw him pass, but he affected not to hear. Then she ran after him, and took him by the arm. He shook her off almost rudely, saying that he had no time to stay and talk. But she detained him; and he had to stop and listen, knowing by experience, what sort of scene she was liable to make if he refused.

It was nothing to her that they were standing in the middle of the boulevard—a place unfit for sentimental confidences, and recriminations. Heedless of that, she poured reproaches volubly into his ear. She was not jealous of the Commune; she had a much more live and actual jealousy than that. She had chosen to love this leader of the people. It seemed to her that her passion for him purified a life that sadly needed to be purified. It stung her as an insult that he was only kind to her and did not return her love; and

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now she spoke to him as though he had actually been her lover, and had forsaken her for this other woman whom he was to marry.

'Even now,' she said, 'you come back from seeing her. Oh yes. I am sure of it.'

He was very angry, but he tried to calm her, saying—

'You are wrong, Suzanne. It is only business that has brought me here—the business of the Commune.'

The word brought a fresh thought into her mind.

'Good. Vive la Commune! We both love the Commune—you and I. But that gives me an idea. Does she also love the Commune? Does she too cry, "Vive la Commune"? Eh?'

He checked her. These were things of which he would not suffer her to speak to him. But she persisted—

'Oh no, she does not love the Commune. I know it. She hates the Commune. When the Commune has to fight she will

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cry to you and beg you to pack up your things and run away.'

It was so true; it seemed so strange that he, who had battled for the Commune from the beginning, should prefer the woman who was afraid to the woman who would be proud to stay and fight with him. Striking that chord, she tried to play on his emotions. She told him passionately that he was a traitor, and then, as passionately, unsaid the words.

'No, no, you won't be a traitor; I don't think that of you, Ernest. But you will be tempted as you would never have been had it been I that you had loved. You will be strong, but you will be tempted all the same. I should not have tempted you. The Revolution is in my blood as it is yours, and what I don't fear for myself I should not have feared for you. We would have faced everything together without regret if only you had loved me. It would have been easy. Oh! why didn't you love me,

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Ernest; why didn't you love me?' So she poured out her undisciplined emotions passionately and unavailingly. For Ernest Durand's thoughts were far away from her in the little apartment at Grenelle. He had no wish to stay there and be reminded of any careless words that he might have spoken to her in the past before Elise came into his life and—save for the Commune—filled it. All that he wanted was to escape from her and think. At last she let him.

'There, go on to your business,' she said. 'Only kiss me first, so that I may try to think that you will love me some day. Else I shall hate you. Good-night.'

He kissed her. It was a kiss that Elise would have forgiven, seeing that it was very cold and formal, and was only the price that he had to pay to her to let him go in peace.

Then she left him and went back into the Café de Madrid, while he walked rapidly on to his apart-

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ment, trying to shake off the memory of the meeting, as one shakes off the memory of an ugly nightmare, that is forgotten when the breakfast comes.

His lodging was on the fourth floor of a house in one of the streets near by. He rang the bell, and the concierge, in due course, pulled the cord that raised the latch.

Entering, he lit his lamp and took a cigar out of his case, and stretched himself in a chair to think. For he had much to think about, after that long talk in the garden of the Tuileries.

Of deserting the Commune, indeed, he could not think even for a moment. The Commune was his religion, and all the circumstances of his stormy life forbade the bare idea of such a thing. As Suzanne had said to him, the revolution was in his blood—had been the tradition of his family for generations. His grandfather had been one of the men of '93; his father had died

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on one of the barricades of '48—a barricade that he himself, a boy of ten, had helped to build: he had learnt revolutionism, as other children learn the Scriptures, at his mother's knee. The martyrs for him were not the Christian saints, but those who had endured death or durance for championing the rights of man. Himself too, in the past, had suffered hardship for the revolutionary cause. Under the Empire for a brief space, he had been a journalist and pamphleteer; and his pamphlets had displeased the government, and earned him six months' imprisonment at Mazas. Afterwards, to avoid more imprisonment, he had had to leave the country, and for a while had made his living by teaching French in a small English private school—a painful task he still remembered with abhorrence. Yet even in this character he had made more impression than the foreign language master usually made.

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For a long time they used to tell stories in that school of the masterly way in which Monsieur Durand had quelled a certain attempt at mutiny. There was nothing to tell, except that he had given orders which were immediately obeyed by those who had made up their minds to disobey and already begun to riot. But that was a thing that had not happened in the French class for many generations, and it had seemed to the boys to mark Monsieur Durand out as different from the general run of Frenchmen, and they had idolised him in spite of his political opinions, which he was never at any pains to hide.

Even when he came by request one day to their debating society, and, forgetting the nature of his audience, orated as he would have liked to orate from the window of the Hôtel de Ville, lashing the vices of the bourgeoisie, and denouncing priests and kings, they did not shout

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him down, in spite of the stalwart constitutionalism which is innate in every British boy. Instead, some of them began to invent romantic legends to account for his exile from his native land. It was whispered that he had been the lover of the Empress Eugénie, and that the Emperor Napoleon was jealous of him, and that this was the sentimental origin of his rancour against the imperial régime. His denial of the legend, when it reached him, was put down to his credit as a modest man.

That was the story of his life in England. It ended with the outbreak of the war with Germany, and the proclamation of the Republic. Then he had returned to Paris, and served through the siege as a private in the National Guard. From that time onwards he had been to the front in every revolutionary movement; in the first abortive rising of October, when Monsieur Jules Ferry was made to eat rats in the Hôtel de Ville;

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then in the successful revolution of the 18th of March, when Generals Lecomte and Clément Thomas were shot, and Paris ceased to take its orders from Versailles. The elections that followed had returned him a member of the Council of the Commune; and he had grown in influence as a revolutionary leader ever since.

The memory of all these things crowded through his brain, and left no room for any thought of turning back. Only he was troubled — terribly troubled — about Elise, whose sad eyes seemed to be gazing at him reproachfully through the coiling wreaths of smoke that rose from the end of his cigar, and hung heavily in mid-air above the lamp. For, clearly, his love for her and his duty to the Commune called him different ways; and when the ways diverged, it was the path of duty that he would have to follow.

‘Have I not done her a wrong?’

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he asked himself; and then proceeded, arguing aloud—

‘Not that she will be in any danger. No, the Commune does no harm to helpless women; and even Thiers’ butchers, if they get among us, will not hurt one so helpless as Elise.’

And then—

‘Still, was I not wrong to love her—to let her love me—seeing that I belong not to myself but to the Commune? Sometimes I fear so. Ah! if only I had foreseen. But then how was I to foresee that the things would happen that should make it wrong?’

His mind went back to the days when his love for her began—the days of mingled relief and ignominy, just after the first siege of Paris. He remembered his walks and talks with her on the boulevards, on the ramparts, in the park at Belleville, in the dismantled Bois de Boulogne. Even then, he recollected, he had talked politics with her; but

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politics had been less exigent and absorbing then, and she had not been jealous of them. His eloquence aroused her sympathy; she felt the spell of it, without, except in the most shadowy fashion, understanding what it meant. That he should talk like that seemed to her to prove that he was good and noble; and that was all she cared about. So she used to listen to him admiringly with open eyes, and he was persuaded that she loved the revolution, when in truth, as she had since so naïvely told him, she only loved the revolutionist. For, though she did not know it, till the times got troubled, at the bottom of her heart she had all the bourgeois' natural dread of revolution.

Ernest Durand knew this now, and felt that he might have guessed it from the beginning. A smile flickered on his lips faintly as he thought of it.

'Yes, it is strange,' he said to himself, 'that I should love a

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bourgeoise, I who have been fighting with the bourgeoisie all my life.'

Yet he did love her, and when he thought of her he felt—what he had never fully felt before—that she had already begun to infect him with something of the bourgeois spirit. For he saw that the bourgeois life meant the home, with all its serene and quiet joys; and his own life had always been so restless and so turbulent that the thought of home appealed to him.

Especially had his life been turbulent of late. So many things had happened since those days of February and March, when they had rambled happily through Paris, talking indeed of many things, but thinking only of each other. The revolution had broken out, and the Commune been proclaimed. For two months the Commune had ruled Paris, and tried to regenerate society with one hand while it was fighting for its existence

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with the other. Then Monsieur Thiers, baffled at first, had collected an army and driven the Communists back on their defences. Passy and Auteuil had been shelled to ruins, barricades had been thrown up, and the prospects of street fighting been discussed.

He himself had been in the thick of it all, working night and day, with feverish energy, and with varying moods. For sometimes he would be consumed with revolutionary zeal, and then he would be angry that he could not see Elise throwing her soul into the cause as he did. And then reaction in its turn would overtake him, and he would be tired of it all—terribly tired—even as he was to-night, and would feel that Elise could give him rest such as none of the wild women who fought for the Commune with his own furious ardour could have ever given him. ‘Oh yes,’ he murmured, ‘I am tired to-night, and when I am tired I want to go

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to Elise and rest, and forget everything except that I am with her. But then how often am I tired? Seldom, very seldom. One has no time to be tired—one has no right to be tired—in these days. If only we can win, if only we can beat back these Versaillais, then I will rest always, Elise with me, and ask for nothing else. But now I do not dare to think of that. I have to go on, and love must wait till afterwards.'

So the red spell held him, and he sat down at his desk, and busied himself with his books and papers, resolved to give the Commune its due share of his time before he went to bed. But the sad eyes still haunted him while he tried to work, and he could not rid himself of the thought that it was for his sake, and because he would do what he believed to be his duty, that they were full of tears.

'My poor Elise. I am so sorry for you, my poor Elise.'

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Those were his last words before he fell asleep.

III

But the things to be done were many, and the time for sentiment was short. So during the last days of the Commune, as on the night of his parting from Elise, Ernest Durand continued to work hard. He was a very glutton for hard work, one of the few Communists—and they were very few—who would rather work than talk and drink absinthe.

He was not, and he did not pretend to be, a soldier. Throughout the days when Monsieur Bergeret, bookseller's assistant, signed himself General Bergeret, and all sorts of shopkeepers and clerks and artisans were called captain and major, and even colonel, Ernest Durand never put on a uniform. Like Citizen Delescluze, Delegate

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at War, who was his hero among the Communists, he always dressed as a civilian in a sober suit of black, with the red scarf of the Commune knotted over it on ceremonial occasions. But he was busy none the less. He had a commission—the sort of commission that went begging because the talkers did not care about it—to consider what measures could be taken by the Commune to improve the condition of the labouring classes. It was the work he loved because it promised to be useful work, and because it was the hopes it held out to the labouring classes that made the Commune glorious in his eyes. He toiled at it with a patience that the talkers sometimes smiled at when they sat in the café, swaggering, and sipping their absinthe. Sure of his duty, he brushed his personal anxieties rudely on one side to make room for it: and, while the cannon were thundering at the city gates, and the aides-de-camp

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were galloping through the streets carrying their despatches to the Hôtel de Ville, Ernest Durand was sitting alone in the silence of his bureau, struggling to forget his troubles for Elise, while he thriddled his way resolutely through complex and mysterious statistics.

From time to time he had to deal with interruptions. It was hard for him not to be drawn into the vortex of the general talk, when, day after day, the talkers came to him to consult him about their duties, instead of leaving him to do his own. Ought not so-and-so to be arrested? they would ask him. And did he not think it would be well if such and such a journal were suppressed? Had he seen this or that proclamation, and what did he think of it? Should not a barricade be built here instead of there? However hurriedly he might send them away they wasted precious time. There were also the interruptions of his private life; for no man

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can get rid altogether of his private life because he is a figure in a public crisis.

So Suzanne Jouffroy, for example, came more than once to interrupt him, dodging his concierge, who would have told her that Monsieur Durand was busy and could receive no visitors. It seemed to her that, as the day of battle neared, his heart should be softened towards her who was prepared to fight so bravely, and so picturesquely, for his cause.

Professedly, indeed, she came to ask for information. But the answer always was that there was no information for her beyond the information that was already the property of all the world. Then she would stay as long as he would let her, asking questions.

'There will be street fighting presently?' she would ask him.

'Perhaps. One does not build barricades merely that you may sit upon them.'

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‘And soon?’

This, with passionate impatience in her tone and in her eyes, as though she were in a hurry for the battle to begin.

‘It may be soon, it may be late. I cannot tell you.’

‘And you? When there is fighting, you will not stay shut up in your bureau? You also will come down into the streets and fight?’

‘Yes, I also shall fight when I am wanted.’

‘Where, then?’

‘Where, I am ordered.’

‘And where is that?’

‘I don’t know. Why do you ask me?’

‘Why do I ask? Because I want to fight with you—on the same barricade. You won’t refuse to let me fight with you?’

Thus she would talk, and sometimes add reproaches,—the old reproaches that he was used to hear from her. She would remind him how he had been kind to her once, in the days when she was poor, and needed kind-

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ness,— would recall careless words that he had spoken, in the days when Elise had not yet come into his life, and he had sometimes relaxed his leisure in the balls and cafés of the Latin Quarter. She would even invent promises that he had never given, and complain because he had not kept them. And, always when she had to leave him, her last words would be—

‘Ah! well. You will have to love me when I come to fight with you,—on the same barricade.’

That, then, was one of his interruptions. The others were when he left his work of his own accord to cross the Seine to Grenelle, and see Elise.

He told her nothing of his meetings with Suzanne. There was no need seeing that she did not question him. And even if Elise wondered now and then, she trusted him, and kept her wonder to herself.

Yet this too was a painful interruption. For events were moving

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quickly, and they both knew very well that any meeting might easily happen to be their last. So that, often as Ernest Durand came, he could not come as often as Elise wished to see him; and though she tried to hide them, the tears were often in her eyes.

'You hardly ever come to see me now, Ernest,' she would plead, after she had kissed him.

'But you know the reason, sweetheart,' he would answer. 'You know that it is not that I do not wish to.'

There was conviction in his tones, and she believed him.

'I know, Ernest. Of course you must always be busy.'

'Always, Elise; or else, you know, I would be always with you. And I am the busier because the time is short. It seems that the work of the Commune never ends.'

The work of the Commune! How she hated it! And how she longed to lead him from it, and teach him to care as little for it as she cared herself! What

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would the Commune, even if it conquered, do for either of them that he should risk his life for it? And what was a principle—what was an ideal—that lovers should put their love by to consider it?

Those were her thoughts; but she knew better than to express them now. For she had promised to help him to be brave, and she must keep her promise. And she kept it till the time came when he had to confess to her that the danger was at hand.

Sweetheart, there is something that I have to tell you. It is certain now that there will be fighting in the streets of Paris presently.'

She nodded.

'One does not know how soon. Perhaps in a very few days' time. In any case there will be street fighting—hard and fierce fighting—before we know whether the Commune is to stand or fall. There may be danger, even for those who do not fight. You may be frightened.'

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Frightened? Of course she was frightened,—frightened for him; and told him so. But his fears were for her.

‘You must not think of me, Elise. Think of yourself. Had I not better get you a *laissez passer*, so that you can go away into the country?’

‘Go into the country, Ernest? And what shall I do in the country while you are here in Paris, and in danger? No. I hate your Commune, as I have told you; but while you stay in Paris I shall stay here too.’

It was the answer he had expected, knowing how she loved him, yet he had thought that when he reasoned she would listen, and hardly knew whether to be pleased or troubled when he found that she would not.

He laid his hand on hers affectionately.

‘You are quite determined, my little girl?’ he asked again.

‘Yes, Ernest, I am quite determined.’

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‘Then you are brave, my little one—braver than I thought.’

She smiled up at him gratefully, so pleased to hear him say that she was brave. She had thought that to be brave one must strut about carrying a pistol, and sit on barricades.

‘But, if you stay in Paris,’ he continued, ‘you must promise me that you will do exactly what I tell you. Then there may not be any danger for you after all. You promise?’

‘I promise, Ernest. What is it that I am to do?’

‘Something very simple. Only to lock yourself into your room, and stay there till the fighting is all over.’

She protested—

‘But to stay indoors when you are fighting, when you are in danger—’

‘Yes, Elise. It will be harder for me to fight if I do not know that you are safe. That is how you must help me to be brave.’

He went on to warn her—

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‘You know, sweetheart, that you cannot be safe if you go out into the streets. When men are fighting they do not always draw fine distinctions. A random bullet—an angry soldier—even an excited Communist—you understand. But indoors you will be safe,—except for shells. And if shells fall, then you must go down into the cellar, as we used to in the siege, and still you will be safe. You promise to obey me?’

She promised to do as she was told; and then she asked for news, hoping that in his fear for her he had exaggerated, and that there was a chance that there might be no street-fighting after all.

His answer was not reassuring. He told her, with candour, everything he knew.

The attack, he said, was vigorous, and the defence seemed to have lost its energy. Forts and outposts had been abandoned; and the attempt to recover them had

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failed. Dowbrowski was in command. The Commune had no better and no braver soldier. But what could Dowbrowski do when there was discord at the Hôtel de Ville, and he was unsupported—when he could not get the reinforcements that he asked for, and the ramparts in places were almost undefended?

‘Then the end is in a few days, Ernest?’

The sooner the better, it seemed to her; and the weaker the Communist defence, the more chance that the Communists might make terms for themselves and save their lives.

A faint suggestion of the thought was in her tones, and it roused Ernest Durand to vehement reply. For the moment the lover seemed to be lost in the rhetorician, and the revolutionist.

‘The fighting is in a few days, Elise, but not the end. The Versaillais will enter Paris; there is no doubt of that. I say it to you, though I must not say it to

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all the world. But to conquer? That is another matter altogether. It is one thing to fight the Versaillais in the open country, where numbers give them the advantage; it is quite another thing to fight them in Paris, at the barricades. At present we are divided against ourselves. The invasion of our streets will heal our discords; and when our discords are healed, we shall be victorious. Above all, with Delescluze to lead us, it is impossible that we shall not be victorious.'

But Elise Rollin cared very little which way the victory went, so that Ernest Durand came out of the battle safely. She twined her arms round his neck and said to him—

'But yourself, Ernest? You are not a soldier. Must you also fight?'

It was her final effort to keep him to herself, and he could not but be pleased at her insistence, and looked long and

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lovingly into her eyes before he answered.

'I am not a soldier, Elise,' he answered, 'but I shall fight then. One does not need to be a soldier to fight at barricades.'

And then he folded his arms round her, and held her to his heart for many minutes, before he could bring himself to say good-bye, and go back to his bureau, and consult with Delescluze about Père Gaillard's scheme of barricades.

IV

Ernest Durand had spoken truly. The end was very near, and every one who knew anything at all knew that it was coming. Yet it actually came at a moment when no one was expecting it.

On the afternoon of Sunday, May 21st, there was a second great fête given in the Garden of the Tuileries. In all essentials it was just such another fête as

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the one held there the week before. The shells fell a little nearer this time, some of them reaching as far as the Place de la Concorde, and the gaiety to close observers may have seemed a little forced. Still, there was music, and there were pretty women prettily dressed in fresh spring colours, so that at least the outward show of sprightly merriment was there.

Elise was at the fête, and she went home in better spirits than were usual with her just then. A staff-officer of the National Guard had climbed upon the platform and made a speech which almost reassured her.

‘Citizens,’ he said, ‘Monsieur Thiers promised to enter Paris yesterday. Monsieur Thiers has not entered; he will not enter. I invite you to come here next Sunday to attend yet another concert for the benefit of the widows and orphans.’

And the people cheered, because speeches of that sort always

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sound plausible when the band is playing.

That was in the afternoon. On the evening of the same day there was a special sitting of the Council of the Commune to try General Cluseret for treason. Citizen Vermorel was speaking, when of a sudden, Citizen Billioray entered pale and breathless from the adjoining chamber, where the Committee of Public Safety watched.

With excited gestures he cut their deliberations short.

‘Enough of this,’ he cried. ‘I have something more important to tell to the Assembly.’

Citizen Vermorel stopped.

‘Let Citizen Billioray speak,’ he said.

Then Citizen Billioray stood up and read aloud the paper that trembled in his hand.

‘Dombrowski to War and Committee of Public Safety. The Versailles have entered by the Saint Cloud Gate. I am taking measures to drive them back. If

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you can send me reinforcements, I answer for everything.'

Then there fell a silence, soon broken by quick and eager questions which Citizen Billioray could not answer, and the Council finished off its business, acquitting General Cluseret with all abruptness, and even appointing him to a command, while the members scattered to seek information for themselves.

That was the hour when the winnowing of the Communists began—the separation of the brave men from the cowards. For the cowards went straight to their homes, or to hiding-places where they might stay safely till the outcome of the conflict should be clear. The brave men prepared themselves to fight. Paris as a whole knew nothing as yet, and learnt nothing till the next morning of this invasion of its streets. The tocsin had not sounded; the noise of cannon was too familiar to keep any one awake. So Paris slept as usual,

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while an army of ninety thousand men poured through the breach, and established themselves within the walls.

The hour when civilians should be called out to fight was close at hand, but it had not sounded yet. For the moment the resistance was still in the hands of the soldiers, who only resisted feebly. All through the night the troops of the line had pushed on, steadily driving the Communists before them, until at dawn the Trocadero had been seized and Muette occupied, and the tricolour was flying on the Arc de Triomphe.

It was the hour for action; and Ernest Durand knew it. There was no doubt, no hesitation now. No personal hope or fear could stay his hand or clog his energy any longer. The Commune claimed him, and the red spell drew him to the fight.

But not at once. He spent the night in his bureau arranging and sealing up his papers. There were many of them, and the task

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was long and tiresome. Still, it seemed best that they should be secured, if possible, against destruction. So he mastered his excitement, and sat down resolutely to the work. By four o'clock in the morning he had finished it. Thoroughly wearied out, he crawled into his bed and slept for a brief space. Then, waking some time after day-break, he hastened to the Hôtel de Ville, to place himself at the service of the Delegate at War. 'Paris must be saved, and only Delescluze can save it.'

So he said to himself, and hurried to seek Delescluze with all his speed.

There was no time now for the invading emotions of his private life, no time to think of Elise, or of Suzanne, no time to be tired—no time for anything but to help to save the Commune. His blood warmed, and his pulse quickened, as he saw the signs of the approaching conflict in the streets. For, at last, the Parisians were

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waking up to the awful crisis that they had to face. The shops and cafés were all closed. At the windows of the houses busy hands were heaping up mattresses, to serve as a screen against the bullets. Every one stayed indoors except those who meant to fight. Groups of National Guards sat, with their muskets piled, at enormous barricades, drinking and playing picquet to kill the time. A troop of women—haridans of Belleville—with Phrygian caps upon their heads and their hair blown loose about their faces, tore furiously up the boulevard harnessed to a mitrailleuse, the spectators cheering them madly as they went. A little further on a fresh barricade was being built. A mingled multitude of women and children were tearing up the paving-stones and running to and fro with them. One of the group called to Ernest Durand to help them.

‘Stop, citizen. You must wait and help us build this barricade.’

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He told them who he was, and whither he was bound. But the days of discipline were over. They answered that behind the barricades all men were equal, and he was forced to wait and work with them for a quarter of an hour before they would let him go on his way to the Hôtel de Ville.

An evil omen that; but there were worse to follow. For at the Hôtel de Ville also he found discipline dead, and everything in supreme disorder. The square in front of the great building was like an armed camp, defended by artillery and fortified with barricades. But it was an armed camp which to all appearance no general directed or controlled. The men sat, or stood, or lay about the ground in groups—most of them drinking, and many of them drunk. Some of them laughed and swore, and cracked unseemly jests. Others, of more serious habit, discussed the situation, vowed that they had been

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betrayed, and shouted advice to their superior officers. Workmen, too, in their blue blouses, and the wild women who fought with them, came and went freely in the crowd, clamouring for guns, for cartridges, for rations, and telling with excited gestures how the battle was going in the parts that they had come from.

Inside the building the confusion was even more complete. Every staircase, every passage, every courtyard was packed with noisy, and for the most part wholly useless persons. They ate and drank, they even danced and sang. Sentries slept through the noise on their litters of straw, and no one waked them. Women stood in the way gossiping, and no one took it upon himself to turn them out.

Where, then, was Delescluze? And what was he doing that Paris had no army but this motley, drunken mob? Ernest pushed his way impatiently through the throng to look for

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him. A soldier pointed to a room higher up the passage, opposite to that occupied by the members of the Committee of Public Safety. The door was open and he entered.

The old revolutionist—his age was sixty, and his hair and beard were white—was there, seated at his desk surrounded by a great array of papers, and writing with feverish haste. His cheeks were thin and pale, his eyes were hollow, and his hands shook a little. On Delescluze there had fallen at the last the whole task of organising the resistance of the Commune. He had not organised it,—so much was evident enough. Yet for two days and two nights he had not slept, but had stayed there in his bureau, receiving information and despatching messages, issuing directions, struggling, according to his lights, to evolve order out of chaos.

Seeing Ernest Durand, he rose from his chair and shook him by

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the hand. His hand was trembling—it was yet another evil augury.

‘You bring me information, Citizen Durand?’ he asked.

‘I bring no information, Citizen Delescluze. I come to ask for orders. Where and how can I best serve the Commune?’

The answer was unexpected. For he was not to fight—not yet. ‘Presently perhaps at the barricades; for the moment, you can serve the Commune best by helping me.’

‘I am at your orders, Citizen Delescluze. How, then, can I help you?’

‘I am tired; I have had no sleep; my brain works slowly. Help me to write out this proclamation.’

Ernest Durand shrugged his shoulders. This was not the sort of energy that he had looked for from Delescluze, and there was a touch of contempt in his reply.

‘A proclamation? Is this a time

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for proclamations, when the battle is beginning in the streets?’

A strange light flashed in the old man's eye, a light, fired by the memory of many revolutions. He laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder as he answered—
‘Citizen Durand, if you were an old man, as I am, and if you knew the Parisians as I know them, you would also know that in Paris it is always the time for proclamations.’

Ernest Durand hardly listened to the speech, but glanced scornfully at the writing on the paper which Delescluze had given him. ‘And what will you decree?’ he asked; ‘here I see you are decreeing heroism.’

And Delescluze replied—

‘Yes, my friend, I am decreeing heroism. Do not fear that there will be the less heroism in Paris because heroism has been decreed.’

Ernest Durand sat down at the desk, holding the half-written

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proclamation in his hand; and then, seeing how the other's nerves were shaken by his excitement, and his want of sleep, 'I repeat I am at your orders, Citizen Delescluze,' he said. 'But you—you are tired. Will you not rest a little while I help you?'

Again the feverish light gleamed in the old man's sunken eyes, as he replied—

'No, no, Durand. I ask you to help me, but I cannot rest—not yet.'

And he added, in the accents of a man inspired—

'What said Saint-Just?—There is no rest for the revolutionist but the grave.'

So Ernest Durand yielded and sat down as he was bidden with Citizen Delescluze, and helped him in the task of saving the Commune by inspiring proclamations and decrees.

They wrote them with glowing eloquence, and in bewildering numbers. There were proclamations calling for barricades, and

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proclamations authorising requisitions. One proclamation said that there had been enough of the soldiers, with their gold lace and tassels, let them make room for the workman with his bare arms; a second called upon the women to come out and fight by the side of their husbands and their brothers; a third declared that Paris with her barricades could not be taken. There was a special proclamation to tell the soldiers of Versailles that their orders were infamous and that disobedience was their duty. There was even a special proclamation calling upon all good Freemasons to rally round the Commune.

And even as they wrote the news kept coming to them from one quarter and another that the street-fighting was going against the Commune. At two o'clock in the afternoon General Dombrowski himself arrived, wounded, to report disaster, and then rode off on his black horse to endea-

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your to retrieve it. Other messengers came, telling of ground lost elsewhere. The Porte de la Muette and the Porte Dauphine had been surrendered; the Versailles were shelling the Tuileries from the Arc de Triomphe, and fighting their way steadily up the Boulevard Haussmann.

Still Citizen Delescluze sat up in his bureau and defied the enemy with his proclamations and decrees, increasing the ferocity of his decrees at the tidings of each fresh reverse, until at the end there was drafted a decree about which Citizen Delescluze and Citizen Durand fell out.

It was a very famous decree—the most famous of them all—and the exact words of it were these—

‘Citizen Millière, at the head of one hundred and fifty fuze-bearers, is to set fire to all houses of suspicious aspect, as well as to the public monuments on the left bank of the Seine.

‘Citizen Dereure, with one hun-

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dred fuze-bearers, is to act in the 1st and 2nd Arrondissements.

‘Citizen Billioray, with two hundred men, is to take charge of the 9th, 10th, and 20th Arrondissements.

‘Citizen Vésinier, with fifty men, is specially charged with the boulevards from the Madeleine to the Bastile.

‘The citizens must concert with commanders of barricades to ensure the execution of these orders.’

Ernest Durand read the order through from the first word to the last, and then tossed it angrily on the floor.

‘I have nothing to do with that decree, Citizen Delescluze,’ he said.

‘And why not, Citizen Durand?’ the old man demanded hotly, looking up at him with bloodshot eyes.

‘Because it is an infamy, Citizen Delescluze.’

There followed the inevitable retort—

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'An infamy? You call it an infamy? You speak the language of the bourgeoisie, my friend.'

'Is infamy then only for the bourgeoisie? And do you hold that nothing can be infamous that a revolutionist may do?'

The old man answered slowly, and with more deliberation than was his habit.

'I hold this, Citizen Durand : that if the social revolution is to perish, it shall perish upon a worthy funeral pyre.'

The rejoinder was as deliberate and as firm.

'And I hold, Citizen Delescluze, that the social revolution needs no funeral pyre, because the social revolution is imperishable.' He did not pause, but swept on, carried by the fierce tide of his own impetuous rhetoric, as though it were not a single man but a great multitude that he was haranguing.

'Crush the social revolution to-day, and it shall rise again to-morrow, stronger and more

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glorious. If we ourselves are not to reap the fruits of it, that is because they are reserved to be the heritage of our children and our children's children. Its triumph may be delayed—has been too long delayed—but in the end its triumph is assured. The social revolution can perish only if it is disgraced. And you—Citizen Delescluze—you would disgrace the social revolution.'

Delescluze interrupted, not to argue, but to tell him to have done. Still he went on—

'You, to whom we all looked to save Paris, you would destroy it. Therefore I leave you. This is no longer any place for me. I do not choose to dishonour the Commune. I prefer to die for it.' It seemed, for the instant, as though the old man would have struck him in his wrath. And yet, for all the plans of outrage and destruction that were maturing in his brain, he could not keep himself from respecting the sincerity of the other's indigna-

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tion. Not that it made him waver in his resolution. The fever burned too fiercely in his veins for that; and the idea of burning Paris held him like a madman's mania. But he calmed himself, and when he answered, it was without anger in his tones. 'Go then, Citizen Durand,' he said. 'You are a brave man. If there were more men like you in Paris, perhaps there would have been no need for this decree.'

Then, after a pause—

'Shake hands with me, Citizen Durand. Presently, if the need is, you shall see that I, who as you say disgrace the Commune, know also how to die for it.'

They shook hands without more words and parted, and Ernest Durand made haste down the staircase into the square, and went to join the battle in the streets.

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V

The fighting was already hard and furious in Paris, though not so hard and furious as it was to be before the end; and while Ernest Durand went out from the Hôtel de Ville to join it Elise Rollin sat up in her garret at Grenelle, and trembled for him and for herself,—trembled especially for fear that his love for her might not endure in this tremendous stir of human passion. For she saw some of the fighting with her own eyes—saw how the lust of battle could lay hold of men; and she could understand how love might take wings and fly away, while this revolutionary frenzy shook their souls.

She had not even to leave her room to see the fury of the struggle. In her own street, not twenty yards from the house in which she lived, there was a barricade, hastily thrown up on

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the morning when the news of the entrance of the Versailles came. The very sight of it aroused her terror. But there was a moment when curiosity prevailed, and, in spite of her lover's warning, she tripped down to look at it.

Here a fresh thing happened to terrify her. Some of the wild women of the quarter, noting that her dress was neater and better than their own, addressed her, saying—

'No idlers here! Lend us a hand, citoyenne, in carrying the paving-stones.'

She did not dare to disobey, but for a while did as she was told in fear and trembling. Then one of the women, more truculent than the others, thrust a gun into her hand and told her she must stay and fight. But this time a man interfered—a strong man who had pity for weak women. There were some such among the Communists, though they were not many.

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‘The conscription is only for the men,’ he said. ‘If women fight for the Commune they fight as volunteers.’

Then to Elise he added in an undertone—

‘Run, little one, and hide yourself away. There is no time to lose.’

And Elise ran for her life, and scurried up five flights of stairs to her apartment, and locked the door behind her.

For a little while she was too scared to do anything but cry. Then curiosity came gradually back, and was stimulated by new noises in the streets. She crept stealthily to the window, and drawing the curtain round her, with the vague idea that there would be danger for her if she were seen, peeped out timidly from behind the blind.

Already the fighting had begun. She had only a broken and imperfect view of it, for all that she could see was the defence, while the soldiers who attacked were

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out of sight. But what she saw was this—

A couple of mitrailleuses and a mingled mass of men and women defended the barricade. Some of the men were in uniform; more of them wore the ordinary blue blouse of the Parisian workman; one—the leader apparently—had the ordinary morning dress of a Parisian gentleman, with the red scarf that signified official rank wound round it. The mitrailleuses shrieked, the muskets rattled, the smoke darkened the air and made everything indistinct. But through the dimness Elise could still see the fighters load and fire, and reload and fire again; and above the roar of the guns she could hear the angry shouts, first of defiance and then of pain, as shot after shot from the unseen enemy struck home. For a space of three-quarters of an hour she saw the battle stubbornly contested. At one moment it would seem that the Communists were on the point of flight.

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Then the sudden reinforcement of some half-dozen fresh combatants would put new heart into them, and they would fight with more ferocity than ever. One man, more daring than the others, leapt onto the top of the barricade, and waved a red flag defiantly. A bullet struck him and he fell. One of the wild women, screaming wild blasphemies, scrambled up to take his place; one of the men seized hold of the skirt of her dress and dragged her down again. And all this time Elise could see nothing of the Versaillais, and only knew that they were near because she heard their firing, and saw that the defenders of the barricade were being killed and wounded.

Then suddenly, as she looked and listened, she heard loud cheers, and cries of 'Vive la République' answering the cries of 'Vive la Commune,' and saw the soldiers of the Commune break and run in all directions, shouting the

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inevitable, 'Nous sommes trahis.' She saw what had happened. The barricade had been turned by means of some of the by-streets, and the Communists found themselves assailed upon two sides at once. Panic seized them and they scattered. The more desperate of them fell upon the men of the line regiments and fought them hand to hand. The rest ran for refuge into the houses whose doors had been left open by their orders.

There was a strange fascination in the spectacle. Her old shudderings at the sight of bloodshed seemed to have left her, and she looked down, like one entranced, watching the uneven battle, the pitiless butchery in the open streets, the desperate struggle in the doorways. Then a fresh dread came upon her. Suppose the fighting did not finish at the doorway. Suppose flight and pursuit and bloodshed went on up the staircase from one landing to the next. Suppose—she ran

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across to her own door, and tried it nervously to make sure that she had locked it fast, and then threw herself upon the bed and hid her head in the pillow, sobbing in her dismay.

She lay thus for a few minutes, and, as nothing happened, composure began slowly to return to her.

Then she heard footsteps—heavy and deliberate footsteps — on the stairs. Gradually they came nearer, and presently a boot kicked at her door, and a rough voice cried—

‘Open! Open at once in the name of the Republic, or we break down the door.’

Still shaking with terror, she made haste to do as she was bid, and a sergeant and two soldiers of the Versailles army entered. Seeing them, she was still more frightened. For what reason could they have come, she asked herself, unless it was to kill her? But they had only come to search for Communists who might be

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taking refuge there. No rigorous quest was needed to assure them that there were none. The girl's manner was evidence enough of that. So they barely made a pretence of searching the room, and the sergeant smiled a little at her terror.

'There is nothing to be afraid of now, little one,' he said genially.

'We have cleared out this "canaille." They won't come back to frighten you any more.'

And so saying he went out, remembering even to shut the door after him, and marched his men down the stairs again.

That was all the fighting that Elise actually saw. From beginning to end it could not have lasted longer than an hour. Afterwards she knew only what she heard.

Yet she heard a good deal. The sergeant—his name, he told her, was Sergeant Boisjoly—was left with a file of men to keep order in her street after it was cleared, and Sergeant Boisjoly, though

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a disciplinarian, was not morose, and was willing enough to gossip with her when his duties let him.

So Elise got many scraps of news from time to time. She heard of the battle at the Church of the Trinity, where the Communists had shut themselves up as in a fortress, and artillery had to be fetched to batter down the door. She heard of the fierce resistance at the Tuileries and the Place de la Concorde, and the bloodshed in the Madeleine, and the unexpected capture, almost without resistance, of the Butte Montmartre.

And all the news she got was news that frightened her. For the struggle, Sergeant Boisjoly told her, was getting more stubborn as the hours went on. The outcasts of the Faubourg Saint Antoine had scented battle and were aroused. All day long they had been streaming down in companies two hundred strong, with bands playing and the red flag

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flying, to take their orders from the Hôtel de Ville. They would fight, these men, the sergeant said. No chance that they would surrender as the National Guard surrendered at La Muette. A pity Trochu, with that precious plan of his, hadn't marched them out to fight the Prussians. But there—that was Trochu's business, and not his. His business was to obey orders, not to stand about talking politics.

Thus Elise got on the best of terms with the brave sergeant from the other camp. But all the things he told her were of little account if he could not tell her the one thing that she wished to know. At last she felt that she could trust him, and summoning her courage asked him timidly, Had he any news—did he know by chance what had happened to a Monsieur Ernest Durand, Member of the Council of the Commune.

'I know nothing of him, little one,' he answered carelessly; but when

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she repeated the question, his curiosity was quickened.

'I think you have a special interest in this Monsieur Durand?'

'A very special interest,' she answered, and he understood.

'Ah, then, you are a Communist. You also are a Communist.'

'One need not be a Communist, monsieur,' she said, 'to want news of one's lover when he is in danger.'

Communist or Republican, there clearly was no need to take her political opinions seriously. So Sergeant Boisjoly answered kindly—

'But I have heard nothing—not even a rumour. If I hear anything presently, be sure that I will tell you.'

He kept his word, and even went out of his way to try and find the news she wanted. But there was no news to be gathered, only vague and contradictory reports. Some said that Ernest Durand was dead. Others, that he had

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been taken prisoner, and marched off to Versailles. Others, again, professed to have seen him fighting on the left bank with Wroblewski. It was quite clear that no one knew really anything at all. So Sergeant Boisjoly kept the conflicting stories to himself, and merely said—

‘You must have patience, little Communist, and wait. And if any one comes to you with rumours, you must not believe them. For rumours are more often false than true. They said that Delescluze was dead, and Delescluze still writes his proclamations at the Hôtel de Ville. When I know anything for certain I will come and tell you. But meanwhile you must be patient.’

‘But it is hard to be patient, Monsieur,’ she answered, ‘when one’s lover is in danger. Are you quite sure you have heard nothing?’

‘Nothing, little Communist, or I would have told you. Be patient, then, and remember what I say,

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that if you hear rumours, you must not believe them.'

VI

She said the sergeant's words over to herself—

'Remember what I say—that if you hear rumours, you must not believe them.'

This meant that there were rumours, rumours that Sergeant Boisjoly would not repeat to her. But Sergeant Boisjoly was kind, and if they had been good rumours he would have told her of them. Then, since he had not told them, they must be bad rumours. It was rumoured, perhaps, that Ernest Durand was dead.

The sergeant said that she must disbelieve the rumours. How could she disbelieve them if she did not know what they were? She must find out for herself, and not be satisfied with getting news at second-hand. She must go down into the street, and into the cafés, and find out what she could.

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Putting on her hat and jacket, she went out, and walked into the shop of a marchand de vin, and listened to the talk there. The place was full of soldiers, with a sprinkling of sympathisers who showed their sympathy by insisting on paying for what the soldiers drank, and all the talk was of the battle in the street.

'They tell me Assy is a prisoner,' said one man. 'In the dark he rode into the midst of our men in the Rue Beethoven, and they had taken him before he knew what was happening.'

'And Dombrowski is dead,' exclaimed another. 'He was killed on a barricade in the Rue Myrrha.'

'And Millière is dead also,' cried a third.

'Is that Millière the journalist?'

'The same. He who wrote the articles about Jules Favre. General Cissey took him on the south bank and shot him with his own hand.'

And others contradicted the story

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told with so much circumstance, saying that the man whom Cissey had shot was not Millière, but some other Communist, and others again told other stories of the fight—some true, some false. But Ernest Durand's name was not heard at all.

Elise got bolder when she found that no one noticed her in all this babble and confusion; and presently she asked one of the soldiers who seemed to her to look less ferocious than the others if he knew anything.

'Nothing, mademoiselle,' he answered. 'But we will soon see if there is any news.'

He banged his glass upon the table to demand attention, as he shouted—

'Say, then, you others. Is Durand dead also? Does any one know what has happened to Durand?'

'Durand?' asked one of them. 'Who is he then, this Durand? And who is it that asks for news of him?'

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Elise replied, in nervous accents—

‘He is a Member of the Council of the Commune, monsieur, and it is I, who was to be his wife, who ask for news of him.’

Then there was trouble. A big burly drunken fellow said something about spies and Communists which frightened Elise. But the soldier to whom she had first spoken took her part.

‘Sit down,’ he shouted to the other. ‘Mademoiselle’s politics are neither your affair nor mine, and you shall not question her about them. If you have the news she asks for, tell it. If not, be silent.’

The drunken man subsided. Because Elise was pretty, and looked helpless, public opinion was against him. Some of the others tried to remember whether they had heard anything.

‘Was it not said that he was killed,’ said one man, ‘fighting with Dombrowski, in the Rue Myrrha?’

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'No, no,' said another. 'Not killed—only wounded. And not with Dombrowski, but with Brunel.'

A third cried: 'You are wrong. Durand is neither killed nor wounded. He has been all the while at the Hôtel de Ville. I have it from a prisoner who had seen him there.'

Sergeant Boisjoly was right. There was nothing to be learnt from stories so various and contradictory, nothing to be done but to hope that the last and best alternative was true. So Elise thanked the tellers of them, and stayed a little longer, listening to the talk, and then went home again.

But the impression that the talk had left upon her brought her almost to despair. This street-fighting was so much worse, so much more bloody, than anything she had looked for. What she had looked for, in common with Monsieur Thiers and the Versailles generals, had been just a

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day or two's sharp fighting, followed by sudden and complete collapse. But now she had seen and heard enough to know that whatever might happen to the Commune, it would not collapse. It would be crushed, no doubt; the invading forces were so strong that they could not help but crush it. But there would be no surrender—not even when everything was lost.

Nor was that the worst. The inevitable barbarities of civil war were now beginning. At first the Versailles generals had taken many prisoners, and sent them off between files of soldiers to headquarters. Now, furious at the ferocity of the resistance, they were beginning to take fewer prisoners, and such as did fall into their hands would generally be straightway stood up against the nearest wall and shot. Such were the stories that Elise had heard, while she sat among the soldiers, listening to their talk; and remembering them,

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she trembled. For she knew well that Ernest Durand would go to meet this fury, and it seemed certain that no one who faced it could escape from it. All through the evening the dreadful thought possessed her; all through the night it kept her sleepless.

Was he wounded, as one of the soldiers had told her? She found herself hoping that she had heard the truth. Then there was, at least, the chance that he might be lying somewhere safely out of harm's way; whereas if he were still unhurt and fighting, every hour that passed only added to his peril. There was another thought that hurt her still more cruelly.

'If only I knew that he was thinking of me through it all, just as I think of him!'

But how could that be? She had seen how the frenzy of the fight possessed the whole souls of men who, till the last few days, had done nothing for the Commune except to talk and spend its

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paper money. And Ernest had not only talked for the Commune, but worked for it, believing that it was going to regenerate the world. How then should he resist the frenzy, and find time to think of her, when the existence of the Commune trembled in the balance?

'No, no,' she sobbed, 'if the Commune were finished, he would be mine and only mine. I know it. But now there is no hope—no hope at all. For the Commune will only finish when all the Communists are killed.'

And out of this thought sprang yet another, the thought of that other woman who loved Ernest Durand, and was not jealous of the Commune, but had vowed that she too would go out and fight for it.

'Who knows? Perhaps, at this very minute she is with him at the barricades.'

She could not help the thought, or the sudden pang of jealousy that came with it. It was no

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vulgar, ordinary jealousy. It was only this other woman's courage that she was jealous of—a courage that she knew to be for her so hopelessly impossible.

O what a picture! A man and a woman, vowed to a great cause, and going out to the barricades to die for it together! The dramatic splendour of it could appeal even to a little shop-girl in those dramatic times. To think that she might have done this thing, and so have kept him with her to the last! And then, again, to think that she had been afraid to do it!

'Yes, yes,' she sobbed, 'I am a coward, and if he thinks of me at all, it must be only to think that I am a coward.'

But then they had told her that he was wounded. It was only one story among many that she had heard. Yet, somehow or other—why, she neither knew nor asked herself—that was the story that had burned itself into her mind. He was wounded, and

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she could not come to him. If she had been brave, as that other woman was, she would have been with him, and being with him might have saved him.

But she had not dared. She had been so much afraid that he had had to tell her how to hide herself away; and now—who knew?—perhaps that other woman was in her place.

‘A coward, and he knows I am a coward,’ she sobbed, and, sobbing, at last fell asleep.

And still in her sleep, which was only brief and fitful, the same thoughts pursued her, the same pictures haunted her. The one bit of street-fighting that she had seen came back to her in her dreams. Only, this time, the leader in the black coat and the red scarf was Ernest Durand, and the woman who tried to climb on to the barricade and wave the red flag in the face of the enemy was Suzanne Jouffroy; they seemed to look up towards her window and recognise her, and

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deride her because she was afraid to come down and join the fight. Then the scene changed. She saw Ernest Durand, with blood-stained bandages about his forehead, laid out upon a couch in a room in some strange quarter of the town. Suzanne Jouffroy sat by him, bending over him, ministering to his needs, and she seemed to hear her voice saying to him triumphantly—

‘You see then it is I, not your Elise, who nurses you. Your Elise feared the bullets, and did not dare to come.’

It was very vivid. She seemed to hear the words as plainly as though they were spoken into her ear, and, calling out in her sleep, she cried defiantly—

‘No, I am not a coward, Ernest, and I will come to you for all the bullets.’

The sound of her own voice woke her. For a few moments she still lay half-dazed upon her bed, regardless of the noises in the street. She was so used to

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noise that a little more or less of it could make no difference to her.

Then waking more completely she gradually became aware of a great red glare lying across the window gleaming luridly through the curtains and the blinds, and lighting up every corner of her room. She jumped up quickly, ran to the window, threw it open and looked out.

A fire! And not one fire only, but many fires on both banks of the river, and in all quarters of the city. The fiercest blaze of all was at the Tuileries. The palace, where kings and emperors had held their court, was a glowing furnace of flames overhung by heavy canopies of pitch-black smoke. But great as the fire was there, it was hardly greater than the other conflagrations. Here, there, and everywhere—from the big buildings in the Rue Royale, from the great government offices beside the Seine—long tongues of

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flame leapt up towards the sky. In the streets crowds were gathering, eagerly inquiring of each other where the danger was, while people thrust their heads out of every window shouting and gesticulating. The firemen of Versailles, hastily summoned, made a lane through the yelling mob as they galloped to their work of rescue. Shells thrown by the big batteries of Chaumont and Père Lachaise fell everywhere, kindling fresh conflagrations where they burst; and a strange and sickly smell—the smell of petroleum—was in all the air.

Elise leant her hands upon the windowsill and looked out upon the awful spectacle. But all her terror was gone now, driven out by the stronger emotion that possessed her. As her waking thoughts had pursued her in her dreams, so the thoughts of her dreams stayed with her now she was awake, and she murmured: 'No, Ernest, I am not a coward

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any more, and I am coming to you—coming to look for you till I find you.'

VII

And the truth was even as she had hoped and feared. Durand was wounded. Suzanne was with him when he got his wound.

'I shall fight with you—on the same barricade.'

So she had promised him; and when the fighting came she kept her word.

It was not hard. Giving no thought to her, he made no effort to mislead her, or escape from her. Matters of more moment occupied his mind. So she learnt, without trouble, that he was at the Hôtel de Ville, and stationed herself in the square outside it, waiting for him.

The noise and the confusion lasted all day long. The routed soldiers came there to be rallied, and the wounded to be safe, and the recruits from the

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workmen's quarters to ask for arms, and get their orders. Company after company was marched off, shouting and singing, to the battle. But Suzanne joined none of them. She waited patiently till Durand came out, and then she followed him.

He did not see her, and at first she did not speak to him. For, if she spoke, there was always the chance of a rebuff, and that she did not wish to court. Better that she should reveal herself to him suddenly, in the hour of danger, fighting for the Commune, by his side. So she followed doggedly, well pleased that he should not see her yet.

He, on his part, had certainly no thought for her. Of Elise, indeed, he had often thought even during these days of unceasing strain and unrelieved excitement. The thought that she was in danger weighed upon him, and the words she had spoken to him in the garden of

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the Tuileries, 'Then there will be no afterwards for you and me,' had come back painfully into his mind, even when it was full of other things. But of Suzanne Jouffroy, and of her mad whim to die with him at the barricades he had not thought at all; and now he was thinking only of the Commune—of the chances there still might be of saving it, and of the growing fear that it would be disgraced.

He was leading a company of a hundred men or so to reinforce the resistance in the northern streets. Some of his men were in the uniform of the National Guard; more of them were ragged workmen come down at the call of the revolution from the slums of Saint Antoine to fight the 'capitalist,' the enemy of all their houses.

They could not march, these citizen soldiers of the Commune; they straggled all over the street and made no pretence to hold themselves upright. A rabble,—

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that seemed the only word for them. Yet it was a word that wronged them, for they would fight, and die fighting, rather than run away. One could gather that from the way they chorused the 'Chant du Départ' as they went along. Presently they were to prove it, in a fashion that would leave no room for doubt. Some of them recognised Suzanne, and greeted her with the cry of: 'Vive la Capitaine!'

She answered with 'Vive la Commune!' and fell into line with the hindmost, adding her clear contralto to the chorus that they never ceased to sing.

Still Ernest Durand did not see her; the rough work before him claimed his whole attention. But her impatience grew. She wanted him to know that she was with him. So at last she ran up, and touched him lightly on the shoulder, saying—

'You see, we are going to fight together, after all.'

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Accident or design? It did not matter to him, and he merely answered—

‘Good. The Commune needs all the defenders it can find to fight for it.’

A cold reply. The Commune had not helped to win him for her yet. Presently, perhaps, but certainly not yet. And, meanwhile, she must not give him any chance to quarrel with her; but if she talked, it must be indifferently, as a mere friend might talk.

‘What news?’ she asked. ‘Are things going as badly as I hear?’

‘We have lost ground,’ he said. ‘Perhaps we shall recover it. We are here to try.’

‘And Delescluze,’ she continued, ‘has he finished yet with his proclamations?’

This touched a note that made him readier to talk. He told her how he had sat all day with Delescluze, and at the end of the day had quarrelled with him be-

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cause he wanted to disgrace the revolution.

She listened, throwing in a question here and there. Lately, she remembered, at a certain political meeting in the church of St. Eustache, she had heard a woman speak significantly of petroleum, and the use that might be made of it. She had applauded then, and nothing had happened since to make her change her mind about petroleum. But she could not let such a discordant thought find utterance now, and when he had finished, simply said—

‘Good. Then we will fight together. You will take me for your recruit?’

And he replied—

‘Why, yes. One would hardly refuse so willing a recruit in these days.’

So they fought together at the barricades; and there is no need to describe the fighting, because all street fights are very much alike. Only, this time, there were no

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fluctuations in the struggle. Some of the barricades might hold out more stubbornly than others; but the time came when each of them was taken. For, when a barricade proved formidable to direct assault, the enemy would enter the houses on each side of the street, and tunnel through the brickwork from one house to the next, until they turned the defence, and so put the Communists to flight. So they battled on, all through the afternoon and evening, the women fighting as bravely as the men, always losing ground, but never losing heart. And, all through the struggle, Suzanne fought on by Ernest Durand's side, happy to be with him, and careful to say no word to break the spell that circumstances had woven for her. But Ernest Durand paid no heed to her; and hardly even seemed to know that she was there.

At last night fell, and they made their bivouac in the open street in

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a darkness lighted by the fitful flare of burning houses that the shells had set on fire, and in a silence broken only by the noise of the cannon and the voices of the sentries posted in their front challenging the passers-by. An attack might come at any moment, and it was necessary to be prepared. So mattresses were requisitioned, and fetched out from the houses, and laid upon the ground to serve as need might settle, either for beds or barricades.

Tired as they all were, there were but few of them who slept; and Suzanne had less desire for sleep than any. The rest seemed good to her only because it gave her time to think.

All sorts of memories came back to her, as she lay there with the soldiers of the Commune, in the narrow roadway, looking up towards the stars. Unhappy memories, most of them, and memories to be ashamed of. She saw things more clearly in the

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chill and quiet hours when the pulse slackens, and the tide of human strength is at its lowest. It was as though a revelation was made to her, and she began to understand the gulf that lay—a gulf of her own making—between her and this little shop-girl whom Ernest Durand preferred to her. She felt that she had been wrong; that she had presumed when she had dared to hope.

And yet Ernest Durand had once been kind to her, and the thought of his kindness was the one shining point among the crowd of dreadful memories, and it was hard to think that this had come between them, and that, even when she fought beside him for the cause he loved so dearly, she could not touch his heart.

Still, even if he would not love her, it was good to be near him. She stole closer and closer as the night went on, and as he grew drowsy she even dared to slip her hand into his. He let it stay there, and she fancied that

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he pressed it. It was only fancy, but it made her happy.

Then suddenly came an alarm, a crash, a great confusion, curses and cries of pain, and loud shouts of defiance as men grasped their arms and ran to the barricade, supposing that an assault was imminent.

It was a shell from the Montmartre battery that had fallen near them, and a splinter of it had struck Ernest Durand upon the forehead.

Now was her chance; now she could help him; now she could do more to save him than his timorous little sweetheart from the Rue de Rivoli.

And first she must make haste and get him to some safe place before worse happened.

She called to one of the National Guards.

‘Citizen Louvet!’

‘Citoyenne!’

‘Citizen Durand is wounded. Help me to take him away from here before the Versaillais come.’

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‘But where, citoyenne? Into the house here, for example?’

She replied impatiently—

‘Into the house? When you know that the Versaillais will be here presently to search all the houses, you ask if you will take him into the house.’

‘But there is no other place, citoyenne.’

It was not her habit to be gentle of speech when she was excited.

‘Are there no other houses, blockhead?’ she cried. ‘Help me to take Citizen Durand to my own apartment in the Rue des Etrangers, which is close to Père Lachaise.’

It was not certain that she would be obeyed. There was a beginning of grumbling, especially among the men from Saint Antoine, who had no respect for leaders, but stickled for equality. One of them began gruffly—

‘If all the wounded soldiers of the Commune are to be carried to the Rue des Etrangers—’

But Suzanne stopped him.

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'Be silent,' she said imperiously. 'Who spoke to you about all the soldiers of the Commune? I said only that Citizen Durand should be taken to the Rue des Etrangers, and I will be obeyed. Why do you call me 'La Capitaine' if you do not take my orders? Do as I tell you, Citizen Louvet.' They looked at her dubiously for a moment, and then yielded. Citizen Louvet lifted Ernest Durand in his arms and followed where Suzanne guided him, and the others refrained from interfering, and one or two of them even shouted 'Vive la Capitaine' after her as she went.

VIII

These are the things that had happened while Elise lay awake on her bed and wondered, and Ernest Durand had already been carried to the house in the Rue des Etrangers when she looked out of her window at the flames,

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and, mastering her fears, resolved that she would go and search for him.

She had no plans except the vaguest. Her one idea was to get into the quarters of the city that the Communists still held, trusting that there she would be able to get some more precise direction. So she dressed herself by the light of the flames whose red glow filled the room, put on her jacket and her hat, and stepped down into the street.

Her friend, Sergeant Boisjoly, was still on guard there, and he saw and stopped her.

'Where are you going, little Communist?' he asked.

'I am going to look for him, monsieur,' she answered.

'But where?'

'Everywhere, monsieur. until I find him.'

'And you are not frightened?'

'Yes, I am frightened,' she said, 'but I am going to look for him all the same.'

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He wondered very much. What could this gentle child have in common with those black Communists, scoundrels who had set Paris in this blaze? He could not understand it. But, after all, it was her own affair. So he shrugged his shoulders and gave her the only direction that he could.

'You must cross the river,' he said, 'by the Pont d'Alma. Higher up it is possible that they will not let you cross.'

'And then, monsieur?'

'Ah, then, I cannot tell you. It will depend. I think it is in Belleville that you will find most of the Communists who are not killed. But how you are to pass our lines and get to Belleville I do not know. It will be hard.'

'I mean to try, monsieur. I have no choice,' she answered. 'Good-bye, and thank you. You have been very kind to me.'

'Good-bye, little Communist,' he said. 'Good luck go with you,'

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and waved his hand, cheerily wishing her God-speed.

And so on the lurid morning of the 24th of May Elise conquered her cowardice, and set forth alone to seek her lover in the burning city.

Moving as one in a dream, and guided only by her single dominant desire, she hardly noticed the horror of the things she heard and saw. Even afterwards, when they came back to her in a measure, she could have given no connected and orderly account of them. There remained only as it were the confused memory of a fearful nightmare, the vague impression of bursting shells and burning houses, of overturned cannon and battered barricades, of the shouting of soldiers, the rattle of musketry, the scream of mitrailleuses, of slippery pools of blood upon the pavements, and dead bodies lying unregarded in the streets. These things, and a few salient pictures of especial horror

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branded indelibly on her mind, were all that she recalled.

At first, indeed, her passage was easy, and undisturbed by any startling circumstance. The quarter where she lived was solidly held by the Versaillais, and even the wildest of the wild women who went about by order of Citizen Delescluze throwing petroleum bottles into the cellars had not ventured there. So she walked along as quickly as the crowds permitted over the Bridge of Alma to the quays.

There were no crowds there, for the shells were falling, and the prudent stayed indoors or had sought refuge in some safer place. Broken lamp-posts and shattered kiosks, and the dead bodies of men and horses, showed that there had been fighting there a little while before, but now the fighting was over and the place deserted.

Close to the bridge, but hardly sheltered by it, a solitary old man sat fishing, the inevitable Archi-

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medes of this time of tumult. But Elise did not think of the story of Archimedes when she saw him, for she had never heard of it. She merely wondered in a dazed and foolish way whether the man had caught anything, and then just as idly wondered at herself for feeling such a curiosity at such a time.

She did not pause, however, but pressed on, dodging the shells, and following the long line of the quays. Nearing the Palace of the Tuileries she again found crowds,—firemen fighting the flames, soldiers keeping order, curious spectators pressing as near as they were allowed to see the awful conflagration. She paused for a moment almost involuntarily to gaze at it, and then, turning up a side street, struck into the heart of the city, where the battle was still raging furiously. That was the time when she began to lose count of her movements. Her wanderings took her everway in turn. Blocked

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in one direction she would choose another, and, weary of walking, still pushed forward to the vague, indefinite goal that she had set before her. Penetrating at one moment almost to the front of the Versaillais line, she would be roughly ordered back the next by soldiers who were too busy with their work of slaughter to have ears for her questions or entreaties. And so she wandered, resolutely, but for a long while hopelessly, seeing things that were to linger in her memory for ever afterwards.

In one street a troop of prisoners passed her — National Guards, civilians, women, and even children. They were handcuffed, and marched bare-headed, filthy and miserable to look upon. The spectators jeered and insulted them as they went by; the soldiers pricked them with their bayonets when they flagged. Well-dressed women from the great bourgeois mansions in the Boulevard Haussmann ran out

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into the road and struck them, crying—

‘That is for my husband, whom you locked up at Mazas!’ or,

‘That is for my son, whom you made to fight for you in the trenches at Asnières.’

Elise looked at them with tears of pity in her eyes. Might not Ernest Durand pass her at any moment, a helpless victim of the same brutality?

But he was not in any of the gangs she saw, and as she went farther, other and worse horrors met her eyes. She saw Communists dying for their faith. And it was not enough for them to die bravely; they must needs die dramatically as well.

There was one old man—a grey-beard of the revolution—whom the soldiers, just as she was passing, flung in their passion upon a heap of mud, swearing that they would shoot him there. Before they could fire he sprang to his feet again.

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‘I have fought bravely,’ he cried,
‘and I have the right not to die
in the mire.’

And then they respected him,
and let him stand up upon his
feet to die.

Somewhere else, in the midst of a
row of prisoners stood out against
a wall to be mowed down by the
mitrailleuse, there was a woman
carrying in her arms a child of
some three or four years of
age. Probably the soldiers had
not seen the child; doubtless the
mother might have saved its life
for the asking. But she dis-
dained to ask.

‘Show these wretches that you
know how to die upright,’ she
said, and stood the little one
beside her to await the volley.

All these things Elise saw in her
long quest, and presently she
was the witness of a scene of
which the pathos moved her even
more.

It happened that she had come
up one of the streets just after
the capture of a barricade. Here,

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too, some prisoners had been taken, and among them a boy of twelve, who had served the guns as bravely as his elders. He was to die. The order had gone forth from headquarters that all Communists taken with arms in their hands were to be shot forthwith without formality.

The little lad, with the smoke of the powder black upon his chubby face, stepped forward and spoke to the officer, saluting him.

‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘this house here is where my mother lives. Before I am shot, I ask your leave to take this silver watch of mine to her, so that at least she may not lose everything when I am dead.’

The officer was moved to pity.

‘Go then, my boy, be quick,’ he said, and let him run, never doubting that he had seen the last of him.

But it was not two minutes before the child was back again. Again saluting the officer, he said—

‘Now I am ready, monsieur.’

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You see that I have kept my word,' and then prepared to take his place beside the other prisoners.

But a great frown gathered on the Colonel's face, and Elise heard him swear a great oath, and saw him seize that boy by the two shoulders and, roaring at him, 'Stay, then, with your mother till I come to fetch you, idiot!' hurl him violently back, with a kick to speed his progress, into the doorway from which he came.

But though Elise saw these things she hardly heeded them. It was only afterwards that she found the pictures in her memory, burned there, never to be forgotten. For the moment her one thought was to get to Belleville and find her lover; her only immediate purpose to pass by some means or other through the Versailles lines.

It was hard; and for a long time it seemed impossible. They were fighting everywhere throughout

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the blazing city, and the space between the attacking and defending armies seemed to be raked everywhere with shot and shell. Elise was almost despairing, when at last she found a way. She had asked the soldiers again and again to let her through, but they had always sent her back ; sometimes, when she persisted, even threatening to arrest her. Then she saw an Englishman, one of the many war correspondents who were following in the track of the troops. At the time of the first siege she had heard many stories about the courage and resource of English war correspondents, and the thought struck her that perhaps this man might help her if he chose. She mustered her courage and went up to him, and told him what she wanted.

‘Impossible, mademoiselle, quite impossible,’ was his answer.

But she persisted.

‘Would it be quite impossible,

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monsieur, if it were quite necessary? I will tell you what I am afraid to tell the soldiers, that my lover is with the Communists, and that I must go to him.'

He answered kindly.

'In that case, mademoiselle,' he said, 'I will only say that it is very dangerous. There is a way—the way by which I myself have just been obliged to come here from Belleville, but you will have to cross a street that is under fire.' 'Please show me the street, monsieur.'

He bowed, as though it were only an ordinary direction that he was giving her.

'This way then, mademoiselle.'

He guided her into a house, and through it to a yard behind. The yard abutted on another street, on the opposite side of which was a narrow winding passage. Up and down the street the Communists and the Versaillais were firing at each other fitfully.

'Are you afraid?' the war correspondent asked.

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'No, monsieur, I do not dare to be afraid.'

'Then wait for a moment till the fire slackens. Now is your chance. Quick! run for your life!' She ran like a hare. A bullet whizzing past her head flattened itself against a lamp-post. But she was unhurt, and for the moment out of danger. Following the passage to the end she found herself at last safely among the Communists.

But even then her troubles were not ended. In the parts of Paris that resisted, the turmoil was even greater than in the parts that had been taken. The shells rained more thickly, for the Versailles batteries were stronger and better served. Fires were as numerous, if not so big, for the Communists tried to burn each quarter of the town as they abandoned it. Order and discipline were lost; the army had become a mob that pillaged when it was not fighting; commands were given by any one who chose

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to assume authority, and disobeyed by every one who chose to disapprove of them.

Night fell, and still Elise wandered to and fro, hither and thither, now in the black shadows of the by-streets, now in the bright glare of the blazing houses. Ever and again they stopped and questioned her, but she told them her errand, and they let her go again. Once only there was trouble, when some Belleville workman tried to detain her, saying roughly when he heard her story—

‘You seek Durand? But Durand is a traitor. Durand said that Paris should not be illuminated.’ For it was thus, as ‘our illuminations,’ that the Communists spoke jestingly of the burning of their city.

But Elise answered gently and pleadingly—

‘I know nothing of these things, monsieur: I know only that I seek my lover, who, they tell me, has been wounded, fighting for the Commune.’

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That struck the cord of sentiment, for the Communists were sentimental to the end ; and the man relented, and let her pass.

So the lurid night passed, and the dawn broke as luridly. Elise was hungry and faint and foot-sore. She could have sat down on a doorstep, like a tired child, and cried herself to sleep. But still her love sustained her with unnatural strength, and she dragged herself wearily, but restlessly, from Belleville to Menilmontant, and from Menilmontant back again to Belleville. And still the answer to all her questions was the same.

'Where is Durand? I cannot tell you. Who knows where is any one in these days?'

Then another thought sprang in her mind. Surely Delescluze would know what had happened to him, and Delescluze no doubt would be easier to find. So with her limbs aching and her strength failing her, she set herself to search for Delescluze.

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But she was not to have speech with Citizen Delescluze, though she got news of him and found him.

He was at the Château d'Eau they told her, and she trudged there wearily and slowly. And when she got there this is what she saw.

In front of the Place du Château d'Eau there was an abandoned barricade. The fusilade that rained on them from the house-tops opposite had driven the Communists back from it, but the Versaillais had not yet come up to plant the tricolour among its débris. A little way behind it stood a group of Communist leaders. Among them Elise saw Citizen Delescluze, and hurried to get near him.

Then it was that of a sudden, and without a word of warning, Citizen Delescluze stole quietly away from the little knot that were debating the fortunes of the battle, and advanced alone towards the broken barricade.

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None of the others at first saw what he was doing, or were even aware that he had left them. Then Citizen Jourde and Citizen Johannard looked up, and seeing him, shouted to him to come back. He half turned his head and waved his hand to them in answer, and then walked on again with tottering and feeble steps. Then they knew that Delescluze at last despaired of the Commune, and thought that his hour had come to die for it; and they stood still, as men in a trance, and watched him. He carried a red flag in his hand, and the red scarf of his office was knotted round his waist. The marksmen aimed at him from the housetops, but their shots fell wide, and he still walked on unswerving and unharmed. At last he reached the barricade. Slowly—for he was very old and very weak—he clambered up on to the top of it, and rose upright upon his feet, waving the red flag above his head. For a moment his friends saw him standing

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there amid the rain of bullets, lifting his left hand as though to screen his eyes from the setting sun that flamed full upon his face and lit it as with the glory of a martyr's halo. And then they saw him die for the Commune as he had wished to die.

IX

So she had come to the Place du Château d'Eau too late to have speech with Delescluze.

Still, Citizen Jourde, or Citizen Johannard, might have the news she wanted. She asked them, though without much hope that they would help her, and Citizen Jourde replied—

'Durand is wounded. He has been taken to a house in the Rue des Etrangers, No. 36. I passed him when he was being carried there; there was a woman with him—she whom they call La Capitaine.

So it was as she had feared. Suzanne Jouffroy was with him,

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taking the place that ought by rights to have been hers. A cruel thought that, and worse thoughts hung on it. Suppose, when she came, Suzanne Jouffroy refused to yield her place to her. Suppose there was a wrangle in the sick-room,—that would be worse even than the horror of her two days' wanderings through Paris. With such thoughts besieging her she turned her face to Père Lachaise.

It seemed an endless journey, though it was not really far. She dragged herself rather than walked along the streets, for she could not have run now even if his life had rested on her running. Her strength seemed to have gone from her when at last she knew her goal and was in sight of it. Once or twice she was obliged to sit down in a doorway and rest herself. But not for long. She soon got up and laboured on again, until at last she read the words 'Rue des Etrangers' written up at the

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corner of one of the streets to the south of Père Lachaise. In five more minutes she had found the house that Citizen Jourde had told her of, and entered it.

An old woman came, with an odour of garlic, out of the kitchen. She was the wife, it seemed, of the concierge, and, even at this hour of riot, the 'pot-au-feu' was more to her than the social revolution.

'Madame seeks some one?' she asked.

Elise told her. She replied—

'Then I cannot let you pass. The other said that no one was to enter.'

'What other?'

'La Capitaine—she who brought Durand, here to her apartment when he was wounded.'

'But I must enter. I tell you I have business with Monsieur Durand, and I must go to him.'

The old woman shrugged her shoulders.

'I know nothing of that, madame. I have my orders.'

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It was quite clear what she wanted—clear that, with Paris in flames, she could still think of five-franc pieces.

Elise drew one from her purse, and pushed it into her hand, saying—

‘But it is as I tell you, and I must go to him. Please show me the apartment.’

The bribe attained its end.

‘On the fourth floor, the door that faces you at the head of the staircase.’

And then, as Elise passed out of hearing, she chuckled to herself—

‘Five francs from each of them. That is as it should be. Now they may fight for him, and we will see who wins.’

But while she mumbled Elise had already toiled on up the stairs, clinging to the balustrade, and found the room she sought. It was in her mind that Suzanne would receive her violently, and her nerves were quaking as she pulled the bell-rope.

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There was a pause for a few minutes. Then the door opened, and she stepped in quickly, fearing to find it slammed on her, and said—

‘I believe Monsieur Ernest Durand is here. I wish to see him.’

But there was no scene, no wrangle such as she had looked for.

For Suzanne knew very well that, if there were any trouble, Ernest Durand might easily hear it and come limping out to interfere, and that would be a sorry way to end the happiness that she had found in being near him. She had bound him to her now by ties of gratitude. Surely he must be nearer to loving her than he had ever been ; and though the charm could not last, there must be no violence to break it suddenly. So, though she hated Elise for coming to invade this new-found happiness, she kept down her hatred, and spoke courteously enough.

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‘I know you,’ she said. ‘Your name is Elise. You also know me, I think?’

But Elise had no inclination to be friendly with the woman who had supplanted her, though it was only for an hour, and she answered coldly—

‘No, mademoiselle, I do not know you. Will you please tell me where I shall find Monsieur Durand?’

And still there was no outbreak.

‘Wait here a moment, while I tell him,’ Suzanne said, and disappeared.

Then she returned, and led the way into the room where Ernest Durand lay upon his bed; and once again, after the long days of agony and battle, the lovers were together, and Suzanne saw that, for all that had happened, they were lovers still.

The wound, it seemed, was not so very serious. He looked very weak and ill as he lay there with the bandages about his head. But he was in no danger, was,

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in fact, recovering, and could already talk a little. So Elise came over and sat down in the chair beside his bed and kissed him and held his hand; and Suzanne did not dare remonstrate when she saw her place usurped calmly, and, as it were, by one who had a right to it, but sat sullenly by the window, now watching them and now looking out into the street, but always nursing her deep and bitter sense of wrong.

That was on the evening of the Thursday, and from then until late in the afternoon of the next day the two women who loved Ernest Durand continued in the room with him. They never quarrelled; they hardly even spoke. Each in a way was afraid of the other, and each felt constrained and embarrassed by the other's presence. But in the presence of the sick man they both covered up their feelings, and tried not to show their embarrassment even by their manner. He needed both

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said ; 'and they buried him in the midst of the uproar of the battle. For below the houses were burning, and the smoke hung over them, and the fighting was in every street, and even in the cemetery itself the shells fell, and the air was deafened by the noise of cannon. But they carried his body there, with the red flag thrown upon it for a pall, and the National Guards stood by bare-headed while the coffin was lowered into the grave. And then Vermorel stood up and spoke to them. "There he lies," he said, "there he lies who was accused of treachery. The first of us all, he has given his life for the Commune, and we—shall we not give our lives also? Let us swear, then, that we will leave here only to follow his example."'

She spoke, in burning tones, with flashing eyes, and quick excited gestures. He felt the magic of it. It stirred his revolutionary fever, as it was meant to, and

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made him long to rise up from his bed and join the battle before it should be too late.

But he was too weak as yet. All that he could do was to press her with his eager questions.

‘Was Vermorel dead?’ he asked.

‘And what news of Varlin, of Ranvier, of Delescluze?’

Then Elise spoke, and told him how she had seen the death of Delescluze; and it was Suzanne’s turn to be jealous.

Elise was not so eloquent as she had been. She told her story without seeming to be conscious of the drama of it, without a single sign of enthusiasm for the cause for which her lover had faced death. But while she told it she leant forward as Suzanne had not dared to do, and held her lover’s hand caressingly, and mixed up herself and her own troubles with the stories, as though these were after all the things that really mattered.

‘It was while I was looking for you, Ernest,’ she began, ‘and

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just before I found you. No one could tell me where you were, and I thought perhaps Monsieur Delescluze would know. So I went to seek out Monsieur Delescluze that I might ask him.'

From this beginning she went on to tell him of the dreadful sight that she had seen at the Place du Château d'Eau, and his eyes lighted, and he murmured—

'Ah, he was a brave man was Delescluze. He has disgraced the Commune; yes, but he was a brave man none the less.'

She talked on, telling him of the other things which she had seen and heard in her wanderings through the streets, ignoring the other woman's presence, and speaking just as though she were alone with him.

She told him of the burning of Paris and its attendant horrors; of the petroleuses, who slunk from house to house to do their wicked work; of the wild women who ran out to meet the soldiers,

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affecting to welcome them, and then offering them poisoned food and wine. Once more, when she paused, he muttered—

‘It is terrible—too terrible. They disgrace the Commune. Where are the leaders of the people, that they allow them to disgrace the Commune thus?’

And, as he spoke, he made an effort, as though he would leave his bed to join them, and fell back again exhausted.

But Elise sought not to excite him but to calm him, and when his strength began to return to him a little, she drew closer, and spoke of things more personal and more intimate. It was nearly over now, she said, this fighting, and he must not think of it any more, because he was too ill and weak. But when he was well again, then they would be quite happy, and there would be no more politics for her to be jealous of. Were they not always happy when there were no politics to come between them?

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Thus she prattled on, paying no more heed to Suzanne's presence than if she had been miles away. He, on his part, was too weak to answer more than a sentence here and there. But the reaction had come after his excitement, and he was tired, and it soothed him to have her there, holding his hands, and whispering her love into his ears, and he listened, gratefully and smiling, and forgot, as she did, that they were not alone.

Suzanne felt the slight, but suffered it in silence. Perhaps, though Elise was as gentle as she herself was violent, there was something in Elise's manner that subdued her,—some tacit assumption of superiority of which she felt the justice even when she most resented it,—the natural advantage which the civilised woman has over the wild woman wherever the primitive rule of violence may not prevail.

So at first Suzanne sat and

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listened to them sullenly with the cruel feeling that Ernest Durand did not want her laying painful hold upon her mind. Then, almost unnoticed by them, she got up and moved back to the window, and sat there nursing her anger and her resentment, telling herself in her bitterness that he had driven her away from him, though in truth he had not spoken an unkind word to her. And there she stayed as sullenly as ever, submissive, but not resigned, with angry thoughts chasing each other through her brain, until she could endure no more. Then with a sudden impulse she sprang to her feet, and caught up her revolver from the table, where she had placed it, and fixed it in her belt, exclaiming—

‘Enough of this. I go to the barricades. They want me there.’ They looked up startled, for they had both forgotten her. But she ran to the door, and had disappeared from the room before

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they had time to answer, whether to approve or protest.

X

So they were alone at last ; and while the forces of the Commune were being rolled back, street by street, towards Belleville, and Charonne, and Menilmontant, Elise watched by Ernest Durand's bed in the upper chamber of the house in the Rue des Etrangers, to the south of Père Lachaise.

A serene happiness was in her mind. Suzanne had gone out of his life for ever, and even the Commune should not dispute him with her any more. She had only to stay there and nurse him through his sickness, and Suzanne should trouble her no more, and the Commune blow by and be forgotten, and a new life of happiness and quiet spring up for them out of its ashes. If only the Commune would die quickly—if

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only the Versaillais would make haste and finish it before his strength came back to him, bringing with it the renewed desire of battle! She knelt down by his bedside, and prayed that this might be.

But his strength was coming back to him—coming fast; and the Commune seemed an unconscionably long time in dying. A thought came to her. There was no one but herself to nurse him, or attend to him. Suppose she were stubborn, and refused to give him food. In that way she might keep him weak so that it would be impossible for him to go down and fight until there should be no Commune left to fight for. Only she was afraid. For he was sick and needed food, and if he did not have it he might die. So she did not dare do this, but ministered to all his wants, trembling the while to see him growing stronger and stronger every hour.

She had not won him yet. The red spell was coming back and

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laying hold of him again ; and she must fight the red spell with every weapon in her armoury.

No doubt of that ! For the noise of the battle was always in his ears, and grew nearer and louder as the time slipped on, rekindling the revolutionary fever in his brain. He raised himself in his bed and listened eagerly.

‘Hark !’ he said. ‘Out there they are dying for the Commune. And I——’

‘And you are very weak and ill, Ernest, and must lie still, and let me nurse you till the Commune is all over.’

She bent over him, and kissed him as she spoke ; and for a while she quieted him. But only for a while. For the uproar of the conflict grew, and his impatient restlessness broke out again.

‘Listen again,’ he said. ‘It is getting nearer now. And I—who was a leader of the Commune—what right have I to be hiding myself away up here, while the people whom I led are dying for it?’

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This time it was harder to calm him. She almost had to hold him down in his bed by force.

'I will not let you go,' she said. 'You are too ill and weak. You know that you could not help the Commune if you went.'

It was true, and he knew it to be true. But at least he must have news. Unless news were brought to him, he could have no peace at all.

'Then find out for me how it is going,' he cried. 'I cannot bear to lie here and not know what is happening to the Commune.'

She obeyed, and went out to look for news, locking the door behind her as she went in the fear that he would get up and escape from her while she was away.

But she was not absent long. In little more than half an hour she was back with him again, with terrible stories to report.

Her face was pale—she could hardly speak for her excitement. But she had found a weapon, a

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weapon with which, it seemed to her, she could not fail to drive the red spell out of him for ever. For she knew things now that must disgust him with the Commune, things that must convince him that no honest man could fight for the Commune any longer. 'It is too dreadful, Ernest,' she began; 'so dreadful that I can scarcely tell you.'

His question showed that he half divined her meaning.

'But you must tell me,' he said. 'They still disgrace the Commune?'

'Disgrace the Commune?' she repeated. 'They do more. They disgrace humanity itself.'

'Tell me, then; tell me, Elise,' he urged. 'What is it that they have done?'

She was eloquent enough now. It was only by her eloquence that she could save him from himself. 'What is it that they have done?' she cried. 'You should ask me rather what it is that they have not done! They have set fire to

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Paris—that you know already, and forgive them for it, and would still go down and fight for them. And now I tell you that they have done murder—cruel and cold-blooded murder—in the open streets.’

‘Not murder, Elise. You must have been deceived; they must have told you wrong. I know every leader of the Commune. They are men who will fight, and who will die—as Dombrowski has died, as Delescluze has died—but they are not men who will murder.’

‘But I tell you, Ernest, that they have murdered. There is no doubt of it at all. I have it from Pierre, the concierge below. It is not half an hour since he came back here, and stripped off his uniform of the National Guard, saying he would not fight for the Commune any more. That I might get news for you I questioned him, and he told me of the murders that your Communists have done, first at La Roquette

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and afterwards in the streets of Belleville.'

He began to understand.

'At La Roquette? The hostages?' he muttered.

'Call them hostages if you like. I do not know. All that I know is that they were the prisoners of the Commune—the Archbishop Darboy, the Abbé Duguerray, the President Bonjean, and some others. They were good men, who in all their lives had done no harm to anyone. But because they had been beaten at the barricades your National Guards marched down to La Roquette, and told these men that they must die. They gave them no time even to prepare themselves for death. Thank God that they were good men, prepared to die no matter when. But your National Guards jeered at them as they were being marched down to the place of execution in the court-yard, and when two of the men, for very shame at their own wickedness, knelt down before the Archbishop

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and asked him to forgive them for what they did, the others ran at them and kicked and struck them and threatened that they would shoot them also. That is why I tell you that your Communists are murderers.'

It was telling—she felt sure that it was telling. But she would not pause or give him time to interrupt. For she had more to tell—more dreadful stories to disgust him with the Commune.

'But that is not all. That is not even the worst that your Communists have done. They have also murdered the Dominicans who were arrested. They let them loose, telling them that they were free, and must make haste to get away, and then shot them down like rabbits as they ran. And then there were more murders—the cruellest of all—in the Rue Haxo, in Belleville. Not great men like the Archbishop and the Abbé, but the common people, gens-d'armes, shopkeepers, private

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citizens, whose only crime was that they did not love the Commune. But the National Guards took them from La Roquette and marched them up to Belleville, and made them go into a yard in the Rue Haxo. The crowd followed—as many of them as could enter—and pushed the prisoners up on to a piece of raised ground against the wall. There were some in the crowd who protested and tried to save the prisoners, but the others yelled at them, calling them traitors, and bidding them be silent. And then they fired at the men—volley after volley—until they all had fallen, and where they had fallen they trampled on the bodies and struck at them with the butt-ends of their guns, like so many madmen drunk with blood.'

At last she paused, breathless, and Ernest Durand did not speak. The truth was too terrible, and he knew not what to say.

But Elise perceived the advan-

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tage that this truth had given her, and followed it. Her manner changed, and she bent over him and whispered to him gently—

‘Pierre was right, Ernest. Was not old Pierre right, having seen these things, to say he would not fight for the Commune any more?’ He seemed to hesitate, and she said the words again. This time he answered faintly and slowly—

‘Yes, Elise. Pierre was right, and you are right. Now that the Commune has done these things, I also feel that I cannot fight for the Commune any more.’

She felt that she had conquered: and, for a little, her trouble was lifted from her mind. He would not fight for the Commune any more; and surely the Commune must be over, before he would have time to change his mind.

Yet it was cruel for her to see that, though he had promised this, the fever still was there, and that he could not forget the Commune, even when he knew it was dishonoured.

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He still would talk of it, though there were so many better things to talk of.

'They are mad,' he said ; 'there seems no limit to their madness. But they are brave. They do not desert the Commune like Rochefort ; they do not slink away and hide themselves like Félix Pyat. Though they have disgraced the revolution, they are not afraid to die for it.'

But Elise had little sympathy with that sort of courage.

'Let them die, then,' she answered. 'Having killed others who had done no harm to them, it is only just that they should die.'

But still he dwelt on their one virtue, saying—

'Yes, but they are brave, Elise. Are they not brave, seeing that if they liked they might escape, and yet they stay to die? They love the Commune, and they will not survive it—at least one honours them for that.'

In his excitement he made her

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repeat the words after him, and say that she, too, honoured them for that. It was but a little thing to say, if only he would not follow their example, and she had his promise, and when she pressed him, he repeated it.

So they sat and talked together through the night, and almost till the dawn. But they both were weary—Elise especially was weary,—and at last Ernest Durand made her lie down for a while upon the couch and sleep. Her sleep was deep and dreamless. For all the things that had happened to her in the last four days had worn out her strength, and now that Ernest Durand's promise to fight no longer for the Commune had set her mind at rest, and the strain upon her nerves was lessened, the sleep she needed came to her naturally and quickly.

But though Ernest Durand slept also, his sleep was shorter and more troubled. The white dawn shimmering through the window

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woke him, and the roar of the batteries at Père Lachaise and the Buttes Chaumont thundered in his ears, and filled his brain with an unending whirl of restless reverie.

‘It is the death agony of the Commune,’ he said to himself, and shuddered.

The death agony of the Commune, with all the high hopes that had had their birth with it! And while it was dying, he lay there within ear-shot of its last struggle, letting himself be nursed back to life again! He went on—still harping on the old refrain—the courage of these men, who would not cease to fight for it until it ceased to live.

‘Yes, they are brave, and they would not survive the Commune. One honours them—even Elise honours them—for that. And if one honours them, then should not those Communists be held to be dishonoured who have let themselves survive the Commune? And will it not be said,

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and rightly said, that these men who have burnt Paris, and murdered the hostages at La Roquette, and massacred the gens-d'armes in the Rue Haxo, had more courage in the end than I had who was ashamed to see the social revolution polluted with those crimes?'

It was the red spell returning; and in his weakness, with the fever of his wound, it had gripped him with a greater force than ever. He sat upright in his bed, and his fingers clutched fiercely at the blankets.

'Never,' he cried, 'never. I have no right to fall away from a good cause because bad deeds have been committed in its name. The cause claims me still. My life belongs to the Commune, and it shall not be said of me that I was afraid to pay the debt. Afraid to pay it? But I wish to pay it. What is life that I should wish to go on living after liberty is dead?'

What was life? Might not life

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with Elise mean happiness enough to console him for the loss of a cause that he had loved? Perhaps it might, if only he had turned back in time. But not now. It was too late, and he had gone too far. For if he lived now, it could only be to be a prisoner in New Caledonia, or Cayenne; and what happiness could such a life contain either for him or her?

'No, no, I can't stop now, I must go on until the end.'

As he spoke he had already got up from his bed, and begun to dress himself in silence, but with nervous and impetuous haste.

He was still weak; he could only keep his feet with difficulty. But he drank a little cognac, and that steadied him and gave him strength while he put on his clothes and fastened his red scarf of office over his coat.

Elise was still sleeping on the couch beside him. He stood beside her, looking into her pale, tired face, thinking of all the things

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that might have been, and of the terrible awakening that would presently be hers. She would wrong him in her thoughts and call him cruel, when she knew that she had found him only to lose him again so soon—to lose him after she had been so brave for him. And for him too it was cruel, though she would never know it. Only the red spell drew him to the battle that was already lost, and he must follow. He wanted to take her in his arms and press her to his heart, but did not dare. For that would be to wake her, and she must not wake, she must not know till afterwards. He dared not even wait to write a line telling her how his love for the Commune had taken him away from her. She had hated the Commune, and she would not understand. But he knelt down beside her where she lay, and softly touched her forehead with his lips, and whispered a farewell below his breath. ‘Good-bye, Elise! Good-bye, my

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sweetheart! I did not know before how much I loved you, and now that I do know I have to leave you. The Commune that you hated calls me, and I must not disobey.'

XI

And so, for the second time, to the barricades!

'How is the fight going? And where do we fight now?'

He asked the question of a man in a filthy blue blouse stained with smoke and powder, who hurried by him in the Rue des Etrangers, and the answer was—

'The fight goes badly. All the left bank is lost to us, and even Villette is taken. Look there, and see how its docks are burning. We make our last stand now at the Buttes Chaumont and at Père Lachaise.'

But the Buttes Chaumont were far away, and Père Lachaise was near at hand, so that it was to

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the battle in the graveyard that Ernest Durand turned his steps.

'At Père Lachaise you say?

Good. And you, too, are going there? Good also. Let me lean on your arm, my friend, for I am weak.'

The Belleville workman gave his arm to the Member of the Council of the Commune and helped him up the hill, telling him as they went all that he did not know already of the fortunes of the struggle.

'So you have been wounded, and you did not know. Ah! well, it has been going badly — very badly. Our men fight bravely. When our barricades are taken we build other barricades behind them. Only the Versaillais are stronger, and drive us from every barricade in turn. Still, they will have their hardest fight of all at Père Lachaise. For after Père Lachaise is taken there is nowhere for us to fly to, and if we do not beat them there, we die?'

'And who leads the people? Who is in command there?'

'My faith, I cannot tell you.

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We have lost our leaders. Some of them are dead and some of them have run away to hide themselves. But our people fight on without their leaders just the same. One does not need a leader to fight for the Commune at Père Lachaise.'

Thus far they were in sympathy; but not when Ernest Durand spoke of those murders, at Roquette, and in the Rue Haxo, which had weighed upon his mind, and made him say that he would not fight for the Commune any more. This only brought a flood of rhetoric upon him—a loud profession of revolutionary faith.

'It is the vengeance of the people on the bourgeoisie. One does not do these things in cold blood, you think—that is true. Neither does one make revolutions in cold blood. But how shall you expect us to act as men act in cold blood when the Versailles are butchering our people in the streets? You heard how they shot Millière—making him kneel to ask pardon

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of Society for what they called his crimes. Well, then, shall such things as that be done, and shall we sit by with our hands folded, and do nothing to retaliate? I think not. No, no, my friend. If it is thus that you speak of the justice that the people has done upon its enemies you should come to Père Lachaise with the Ver-saillais, and not with us.'

But this was no time for angry argument, and Ernest Durand answered—

'My friend, it is because I love the Commune that I would not see it stained with crime. But, also because I love the Commune, I am coming now with you to offer my life for it at Père Lachaise.'

So the quarrel between them got no further, and they walked on in silence till they reached the place where the last desperate survivors of the revolution waited to give battle to the soldiers of the line in the burial-ground upon the hill. It is a weird place at any time—

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this cemetery of Père Lachaise. They call it the City of the Dead, and from the distance you would surely think it was a city rather than a place of tombs. For you find there none of the green grass, the trim flower-beds, the branching trees that you are used to see in other graveyards. But the monuments and mortuary chapels are built almost as high as houses, and packed together like houses in terraces and rows, with avenues and alleys paved with hard cobble stones running like streets between them. It seems, indeed, as though the Parisians loved their city life so well that they must needs have a city to dwell in even after death. That is the appearance of the cemetery of Père Lachaise to-day; that is the appearance it has borne for more than twenty years. But when Ernest Durand and his rough comrade passed its barriers on that Sunday afternoon in May, it was a very different sight they saw there.

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The Communists had made a fortress and a camp of Père Lachaise. They had entrenched themselves among the tombs, breaking down the monuments to build their barricades, and scattering the wreaths of immortelles to make their bivouac. A battery of six guns in front of the chapel threw its shells into the heart of Paris, a smaller battery to the right answered the big guns that pounded at it from the Butte Montmartre. Behind the great gate that opens on the Rue de la Roquette was a solid barricade protected by artillery, and other barricades stood elsewhere, wherever it seemed to the defenders that an attack was possible.

But that was only half the horror of the spectacle. For below raged the flames of blazing Paris, which all the efforts of the firemen of the Versaillais had still been unable to extinguish, and the roar of cannon, the rattle of musketry, and the savage shouts of the soldiers told of the death agony

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of the Commune being played at the few rallying-points elsewhere that still remained unvanquished ; while near at hand, and drawing continually nearer, amid the wrecks of shattered houses, were seen the uniforms of Vinoy's regiments preparing for the assault. And through all the horror, with the inevitable end of it apparent to every eye, these men kept up their courage, and laughed at danger and blasphemed at death ; and the women let themselves be kissed behind the tombstones, and the wounded men threw wine upon their wounds and drank to the Commune with their comrades.

Pale from his loss of blood and trembling with his weakness, Ernest Durand came down into this place of tumult leaning on the Belleville workman's arm. He passed the great trench—the fosse commune—where lay the bodies of the Archbishop, the Abbé Duguerray, and the other hostages slain at La Roquette.

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A shudder shook him, but he repressed it with an effort and walked on. Some of the Communists recognised him as he passed and raised a cheer. Members of the Council of the Commune were not plentiful that day at Père Lachaise, and the advent of one of them was matter for jubilant remark. Many of them were already dead, and many more of them had fallen away from the cause because death seemed so certain. So while Ernest Durand looked round among the faces of the crowd, and hardly discovered any that he knew, his passage through their midst was greeted every now and again with cries of 'Vive Durand!'

And it chanced that as he came, and even before the cry that welcomed him was heard, his name was already on the lips of some of them.

For there was only work as yet for those who served the guns, and in one of the corners of the

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ground a knot of men were talking, while they waited for the battle to begin, and telling each other which of their leaders had been false and which faithful to the Commune.

‘Vermorel is dead, I know,’ one said, ‘and so is Millière and Raoul Rigault. But does any one know what has happened to Durand?’

‘Durand? He is dead also without doubt,’ the other answered.

‘You think that?’

‘How should I think otherwise? Durand is a brave man, and if he were not dead then it is certain that he would be with us here at Père Lachaise.’

It happened too that Suzanne Jouffroy was near the group, and, hearing the name spoken, she listened and looked up.

She heard a woman join in the talk,—a petroleuse, a dishevelled harridan of Belleville, with grime on her face, and blood upon her hands.

‘Durand is not dead,’ the woman said. ‘He is a traitor.’

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‘Durand a traitor? Who says Durand is a traitor?’

‘I say so.’

‘How do you know he is a traitor?’

‘Because I was there at the Hôtel de Ville, where we had gone to ask Delescluze for a mitrailleuse in order to defend Montmartre, and heard what the people said. Durand quarrelled with Delescluze. It was when Delescluze gave the order for the burning of the Tuileries. Durand opposed him. He said it was an infamy. A National Guard who was at the door heard him. They would have arrested Durand, he told me, if he had not escaped.’

‘Good. A pity they did not. Death to all the bourgeoisie, say I, and if Durand is bourgeois at heart, death also to Durand.’

An idle thought—a grimly humorous thought, if any one had seen its humour—to wish death to any man at such an hour. But the listeners did not perceive

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the ghastly jest, but only blasphemed hideously until, at last, Suzanne struck into the wrangle to tell how, to her knowledge, Durand had only left the Hôtel de Ville to lead the men of Saint Antoine to the barricades. But almost before she had begun to tell her story, they heard the shouting in the other quarters of the cemetery, and above the cry of 'Vive la Commune!' caught the cry of 'Vive Durand!'

The drunken hag's fingers reached out with a meaning gesture towards the trigger of her musket. Suzanne saw the action and sprang forward, but one of the men was beforehand with her, and with a rapid movement struck the barrel up.

'Stay,' he cried, 'if Durand comes to us here, then it is certain he is no traitor.'

The other echoed, 'True, those are not traitors who come to fight, after the game is up, at Père Lachaise. Vive la Commune, my friends, and vive Durand!'

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So their mood changed in a moment, and enthusiasm succeeded to distrust. As he advanced in their direction they all joined in the cry of 'Vive Durand,' and the men ran forward and held out their hands to welcome him, and the woman, who but an instant since had seemed to hunger for his life, insisted on throwing her blood - smeared arms about his neck and kissing him.

Ernest Durand submitted to their tumultuous greeting, as he had already submitted to other greetings of the sort while he was passing through the cemetery. But there was no answering enthusiasm in his manner, for his mood was a very different mood from theirs.

The final butchery was very close. The thunder of the guns was louder; the rolling of the drums was heard beneath, heralding the attack that was to begin directly; men caught up their rifles hurriedly, and shouted contradictory

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orders to each other to rally here or there, or to train the cannon this way or that. But Ernest Durand stood calm in the midst of the confusion, with neither hatred nor passion in his look—only a profound despair, tempered by a profound disdain.

At first—his thoughts being elsewhere—he had not even seen Suzanne, and she, for a moment remembering what their last parting had been like, had a mind to pretend that she did not see him either. But the thought flashed out of her mind as quickly as it had entered it, and she ran up to him and spoke.

‘So you have come,’ she said. ‘I always knew that you would come. Only I know that it is not for my sake that you have come.’

‘I have come for the Commune’s sake, Suzanne,’ he answered.

‘Yes, yes, I know. You were always a good Communist. That is what made it so cruel that you would not love me.’

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And then, in a softer tone, and without any of the old accent of reproach or blame—

‘And she—she has let you come?’

‘She did not know,’ he said, and then turned the subject quickly, speaking of her own care for him when he was wounded, and saying that he owed his life to her—the life that he had now come to Père Lachaise to end.

But she cut short his speech, laying her hands upon his shoulder, and looking up into his eyes.

‘You wish to thank me, Ernest?’ she said, and paused.

‘Yes, of course, I wish to thank you, Suzanne.’

She looked at him steadfastly for a moment.

‘Then make haste and kiss me, —one real kiss, of your own accord, before my time comes to die.’

Why should he refuse? Surely she had earned this, seeing that

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she had saved his life. With the tumult of the fight beginning round them, he bent down and kissed her on the lips.

For a second she clung to him passionately, as though she would fasten love for her upon him. Then, with a sudden movement, she broke away from him again. 'There,' she cried. 'Now I go to get myself killed before you are sorry that you kissed me,' and before he could answer her she had run down the hill out of his sight towards the barricade that faced the entrance - gate. Then for a space he was left alone with his own thoughts. He travelled back again in fancy to the little room in the Rue des Etrangers, and a sob swelled in his throat when he thought of Elise and of the happiness that might have been theirs if the Commune had never come between them. It was only a short fortnight since she had said to him in the garden of the Tuileries that life was worth

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more than politics, and that one must choose between them. How could he say that she was wrong when this was where politics had led him,—to do battle in this fearful place, with none but ruffians and assassins, whose crimes he loathed, for his allies? Not that he could turn back now. No, no. The Commune itself was great and glorious, although the Communists had shamed it, and he had gone so far that he must go on till the end. And yet, and yet——

But as he mused, standing there alone, a little group of Communists suddenly ran by him, and one of them, observing that he carried no weapon, and had nothing in his hand except his light malacca cane, broke into his reverie, calling rudely——

‘I see you are unarmed, Citizen Durand. You do not go to fight the Versailles with your walking-stick?’

With a stony, impassive look in his grey eyes, he answered——

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'Yes, citizen, it is as you say. I am unarmed.'

A dozen weapons of one sort or another were held out to him by eager hands. A dozen eager voices cried—

'Here, Citizen Durand! Take this! Take this!'

But Ernest Durand waved them all back with a strange dignity beyond their understanding.

'I thank you all,' he said, 'but I have no need for arms to-day. I do not fight for the Commune any more. I only die for it.'

The words amazed them, and they stood round him speechless, wondering at what he said. There were some among them who hated him for the saying, and feeling that he scorned them would have been glad to slay him where he stood. But the spell of excitement fell upon the rest, and roused them to a wild enthusiasm for the devotion of the man who, though he sympa-

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thised with them no more by reason of the things that they had done, had come down to Père Lachaise to die with them all the same. They burst into a sudden cheer: 'Vive Durand! vive Durand!' they bellowed madly, tossing their caps into the air and pushing right and left to find a place for him in the very forefront of the fight.

And the others heard the cheer and caught it up, they knew not why, so that even above the cry of 'Vive la Commune!' the cry of 'Vive Durand! vive Durand!' passed all along their line of battle, as they saw him with the bloodstained bandage on his brow and his red scarf girt about his sober suit of black, standing erect with folded arms upon the barricade, and waiting for his bullet in the place where bullets hailed the thickest.

But down below, in the little room in the Rue des Etrangers, Elise Rollin still slept on. The tumult of the battle did not wake

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her, and the sun had set and the last Communist defence had yielded, and the Commune itself had become a memory, before they came and told her how at the end the Red Spell had drawn her lover to his death.

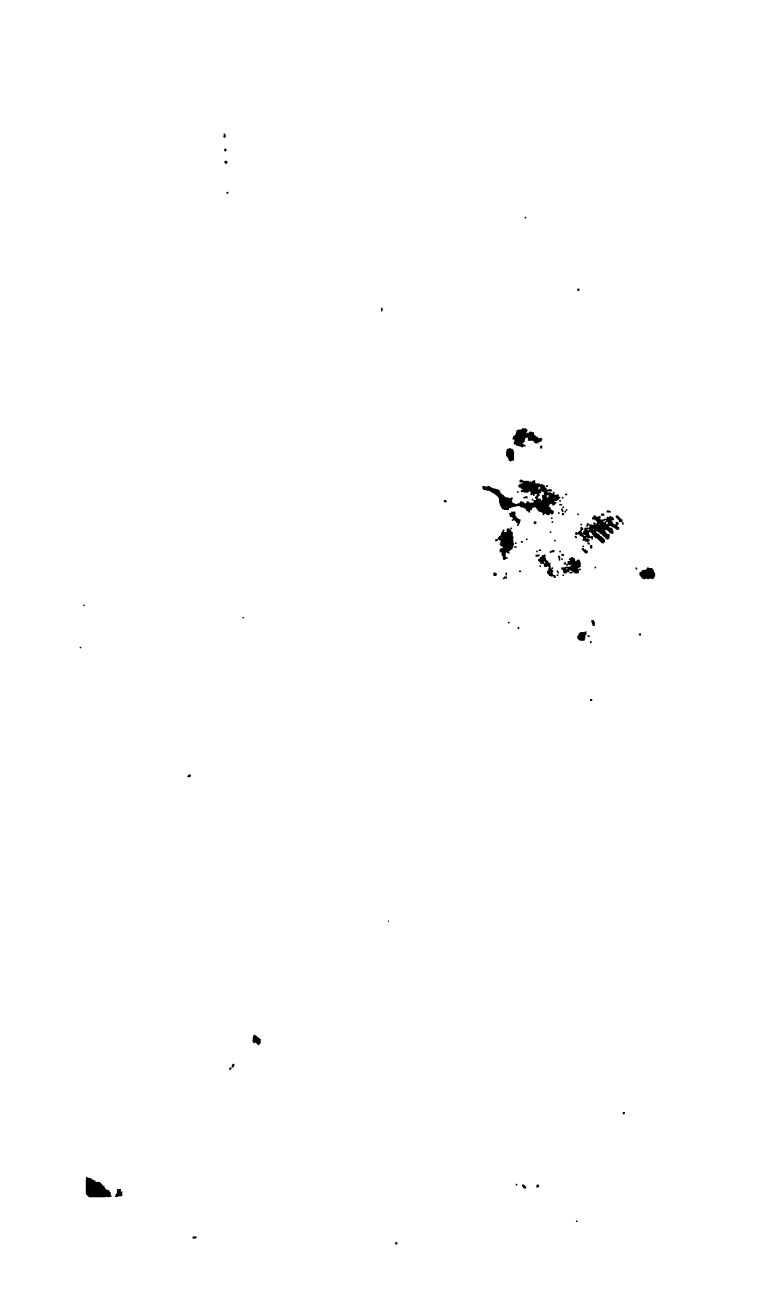
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